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UNTHINKABLE

A NOVEL OF DARK MYSTERY

by FRANCIS SIBSON

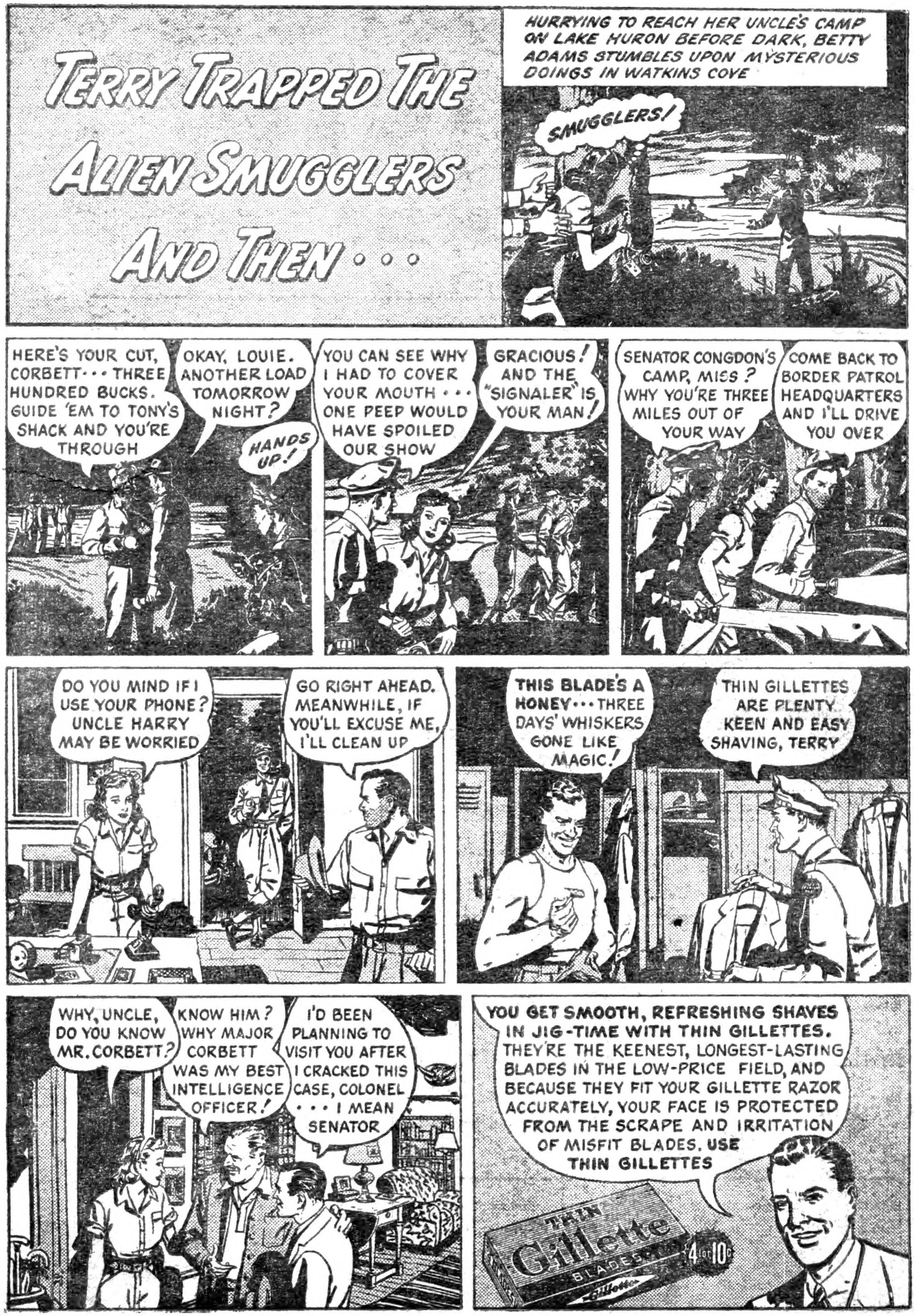
G. WHITLEY

•

E. F. BENSON

•

AND OTHERS


TERRY TRAPPED THE ALIEN SMUGGLERS AND THEN . . .
HURRYING TO REACH HER UNCLE'S CAMP ON LAKE HURON BEFORE DARK, BETTY ADAMS STUMBLES UPON MYSTERIOUS DOINGS IN WATKINS COVE
SMUGGLERS!
HERE'S YOUR CUT, CORBETT · · · THREE HUNDRED BUCKS. GUIDE 'EM TO TONY'S SHACK AND YOU'RE THROUGH
OKAY, LOUIE. ANOTHER LOAD TOMORROW NIGHT?
HANDS UP!
YOU CAN SEE WHY I HAD TO COVER YOUR MOUTH · · · ONE PEEP WOULD HAVE SPOILED OUR SHOW
GRACIOUS! AND THE "SIGNALER" IS YOUR MAN!
SENATOR CONGDON'S CAMP, MISS? WHY YOU'RE THREE MILES OUT OF YOUR WAY
COME BACK TO BORDER PATROL HEADQUARTERS AND I'LL DRIVE YOU OVER
DO YOU MIND IF I USE YOUR PHONE? UNCLE HARRY MAY BE WORRIED
GO RIGHT AHEAD. MEANWHILE, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I'LL CLEAN UP
THIS BLADE'S A HONEY · · · THREE DAYS' WHISKERS GONE LIKE MAGIC!
THIN GILLETTES ARE PLENTY KEEN AND EASY SHAVING, TERRY
WHY, UNCLE, DO YOU KNOW MR. CORBETT?
KNOW HIM? WHY MAJOR CORBETT WAS MY BEST INTELLIGENCE OFFICER!
I'D BEEN PLANNING TO VISIT YOU AFTER I CRACKED THIS CASE, COLONEL · · · I MEAN SENATOR
YOU GET SMOOTH, REFRESHING SHAVES IN JIG-TIME WITH THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD, AND BECAUSE THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR ACCURATELY, YOUR FACE IS PROTECTED FROM THE SCRAPE AND IRRITATION OF MISFIT BLADES. USE THIN GILLETTES
THIN Gillette BLADES
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VOL. 8 DECEMBER, 1946 No. 2

Book-Length Novel

Unthinkable **Francis Sibson** 10

An outcast ship on a lost horizon, she sailed toward her strange rendezvous with the dead—the ghost vessel which had fought back from the legends of the past—to find no world left to hear her story!

Reprinted by arrangement with Random House, N. Y.

Short Stories

At the Farmhouse **E. F. Benson** 102

Carefully he planned his perfect crime, so no trace of tangible evidence could possibly remain. That the flaw might be intangible never entered his mind. . . .

First N. A. Magazine Rights purchased from the estate of E. F. Benson.

And Not in Peace **George Whitley** 112

He laughed at devils and vampires and wasn't afraid, because they belonged to the world of fantasy—forgetting that it is sometimes the realest world of all. . . .

The Readers' Viewpoint 6

In the Next Issue 101

Cover by Finlay. Inside illustrations by Lawrence and Finlay.

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries,
All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York

"BEAUTIFULLY SYMBOLIC"

Dear Editor:

"The Twenty-fifth Hour" was the best novel you have printed since "The Ancient Allan". "Before the Dawn" might have been good, but I missed it. Not a single flaw. How about more by Best?

"The Secret of the Growing Gold" was excellent! Bram Stoker was one of the earliest, and finest writers of horror fiction. Glad to see you using "Burial of the Rats" next time.

F.F.M. is the Hall of Fame of Fantasy, and will be as long as you use authors such as H. P. Lovecraft, Stoker, Algernon Blackwood, Arthur Machen, Lord Dunsany, E. F. Benson, C. L. Moore, H. G. Wells, Ray Bradbury, William Hope Hodgson, etc.

Lawrence's cover is beautifully symbolic. Please, no more like the April cover! I agree with Miss Mohler on that. All inside illustrations perfect.

LLOYD ADAMS.

R.F.D. 1
Portville, N. Y.

MARVELOUS COVER!

The strangest coincidences keep happening to me! In the past two weeks I have read three novels about the world of the future reverting to savagery. The first was "The Twenty-fifth Hour", the second, "Deluge" by Wright, and the third, "The Machine Stops" by Smith. And the strangest thing about it is that they all take place in England! Why doesn't some intrepid soul write such a story taking place in America? It would be a pleasant change.

"The Twenty-fifth Hour" by Best was very good. "Deluge", I got from the Verona library and I just bought the March '45 F.F.M. in which "The Machine Stops" appeared.

I'm new at this letter writing game, but I like it very much. I cordially invite any other newcomers to write me and compare notes.

I have been reading F.F.M. for only about a year now, but I am very enthusiastic about it. I won't go into rapturous dreams about the perfect F.F.M.; all I can say is keep up the great work.

JIMMY WHEATON.

23 Montclair Ave.
Verona, N. J.

P. S. That was a marvelous cover on the August issue. If you hold the mag at a distance, the skull assumes a fiendish expression. A very fine Lawrence.

PRAISE FOR MR. BEST

I obtained the August F.F.M. with the "Better late than never" phrase running through my mind, and so plunged again into several hours of reading pleasure.

A photograph of the cover arrived earlier, via *Fanews*. It was misleading because the blues on the original failed to register as usual. I therefore expected a notably gawdy death's head, giving me the eye, but was relieved to find a greatly subdued although none the less effective piece of excellent symbolism.

"The Twenty-fifth Hour" besides being offered by one of America's popular contemporaries, was distinguished for yet another reason. Most stories depicting the degeneration of man to a primitive state resort to some deadly destroyer, either purposely or accidentally unleashed on mankind. Herbert Best relied on this trite idea only slightly when he brought in the spreading of disease germs. The main cause of man's down-fall was shown to be of an economic nature. A disintegration of the systems that serve and protect us. This obviously is the more logical way, and naturally adds to the book's convincingness. Also interesting was the way the author tried to give the reader an insight into the terrible mental tortures endured by the characters. For all of its fine points, I'm afraid that I became weary toward the end.

Two words describe the mutual feelings of myself and Geoffrey Brent after the episode of the "Growing Gold". Hair Raising! This sort of course will herald in more from Stoker's direction. Preferably something from "Dracula's Guest".

There has come into my possession, a first edition of Merritt's "The Moon Pool". Published in 1919 by Liveright it is, I believe, the first time his work appeared between hard covers. Interested? Write!

The coming October issue looks as if it will be taken over by our English cousins, with the exception of Miss Moore. I wonder if "Daemon" will better her "Doorway into Time"? Anyway, it promises to be a memorable magazine.

R. I. MARTINI.

310 W. 66 St.,
KC. (5) Mo.

LIKES NEW WRITERS, TOO

Despite the fact that it marked another alarming step in F.F.M.'s recent trend away from fantasy, "The Twenty-fifth Hour" was a highly enjoyable novel, perhaps this year's best—so far.

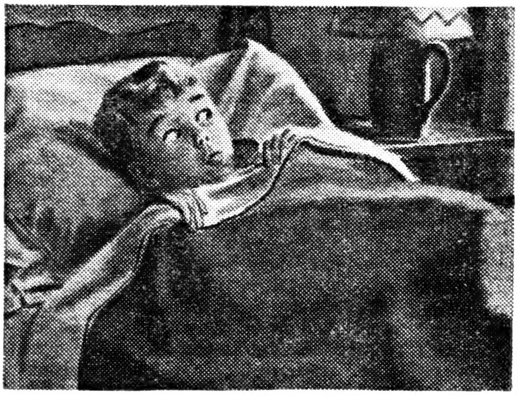
Parts One and Four, especially the latter, had an aura of grim reality that equalled the famous "Final Blackout" without that story's unrelieved gloom. I was very glad to see that Best avoided the vapid sentimentality that mars most "survival" tales and which so utterly

(Continued on page 8)

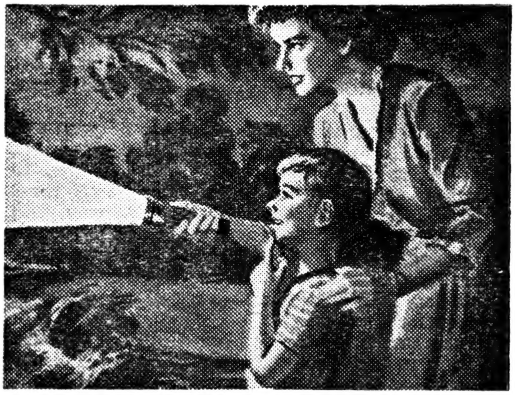
How to help your child fight

FEAR OF DARKNESS

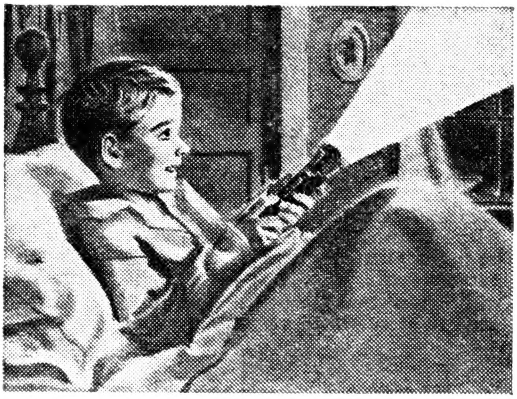
... as recommended in the interest of child welfare by Rose G. Anderson, Ph. D.,
Director of the Psychological Service Center of New York



1 Fear of the dark is founded on a dread of the unknown. Many a grown man feels his courage ebb with the daylight. And to a child, whose limited experience makes him even more fearful, the dark can be filled with terrors ... unfounded fears.



2 Bring back the daylight world he knows, with your "Eveready" flashlight ... show that the yard, or the basement, is the same familiar place by night as by day ... that night-time sounds are made by simple things. Let him use your flashlight himself—



3 Encourage him to perform small tasks after dark, when he may use his "Eveready" flashlight, such as putting his toys away or getting something for you from a dark closet. Above all, never frighten him with "Bogeyman"; appeal to his pride. Then he will *accept* darkness.

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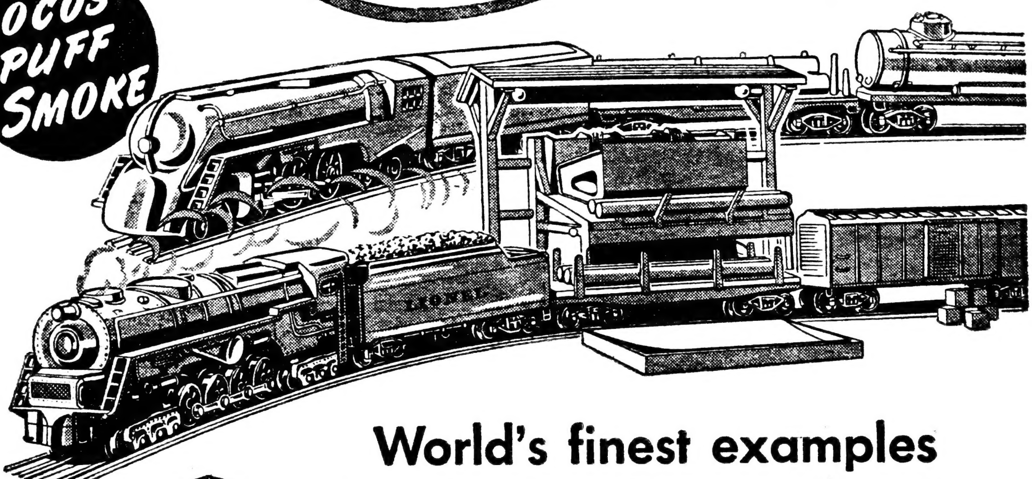

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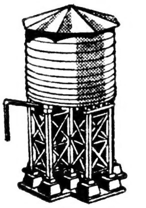

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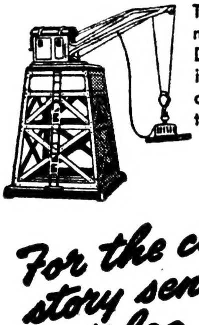

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(Continued from page 6)

ruined the "Darkness and Dawn" trilogy. And I liked the mild flashes of quite delicious humor which surprisingly didn't disturb the serious tenor of the novel as a whole.

The unique characters, although attractive at first, become more and more startling as I mull the yarn over: the slightly introverted cannibal who started as a Cambridge grad, the girl who loved her brother's murderer, the whimsical Oxonian who started apparently the world's first "civilized" civilization without even getting his name in the tale, etc. Quite a collection.

The Stoker item was pallidly insignificant by comparison.

I was shocked to see Wells' novel scheduled, since his work certainly deserves the overworked phrase: "available in every library." In addition, you can still buy seven of his best novels in one volume at a price of slightly more than 30c per novel. Let's have the rarer item, if you please.

Glad to see Mesdames Moore and Dane, although momentarily surprised to find them together. It's queer indeed the way F.F.M. has affected my once strictly "textbook" literary tastes. I've seen Dunsany, Blackwood, de Maupassant, Haggard, Machen, etc. climb into the ring with various pulpsters and oft times emerge a bad second. All of which is a circumambient way of approaching my request that you use C. L. Moore, Jack Williamson, and/or Ray Bradbury for a little original fantasy. They could certainly supply you with the quality you need and also satisfy the search for original yarns you mentioned briefly in a recent writer's mag.

Hope you can be editing a monthly soon. Good luck.

GARVIN BERRY.

5416 Avenue R
Galveston, Texas

PHILLY'S SF CONFERENCE

Before the war it was the custom of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society to act as hosts at what we called the annual Philadelphia Conferences. We are resuming these conferences this year, and wish to announce that on Sunday, October 27, we would like to see all the Eastern fans gathered in Philadelphia for an afternoon of talks and discussions on fantasy subjects.

This particular meeting is of special interest, since it marks the tenth anniversary of that Sunday when a group of fans came down from New York to Philadelphia and we decided to call it the first science fiction "convention."

The general purpose of these conferences is threefold: an opportunity to meet fans and authors and indulge in fangab, a chance to take care of business concerning fan organization, and the intellectual stimulation of talk about rockets, atomics, and fantasy literature.

So that this conference will include participation by those attending, we would like to hear from fans who have topics which they would like to discuss, or have any information they would like to present.

All interested in coming should contact me for information concerning the exact time and place of the meeting.

MILTON A. ROTHMAN.

2113 N. Franklin St.,
Philadelphia 2, Pa.

1947 CONVENTION!

The Philadelphia Science Fiction Society invites all readers of F.F.M. residing in or around Philadelphia to join up with the fastest growing fan organization in the USA. The PSFS is the club which will sponsor the World Convention of 1947! Among our members are such authors of science fiction and fantasy as L. Sprague de Camp, A. M. Phillips, and Lee Gregor; such fans as Oswald Train, Milton A. Rothman, etc. In recent months the membership has increased to such an extent that it was found very inadvisable to hold meetings in members' homes, so we had to find our own clubroom. Why not stop around and chew the fat with a bunch of kindred souls? Dues are but 50c a month, and you'll have the time of your life if you are a fantasy fan. Meetings are held every other Sunday evening at our new location at 56th and Pine Streets in Philadelphia.

As mentioned above, the 5th World Science Fiction Convention will be held in Philadelphia under the joint supervision of the PSFS and The Philcon Society. The latter organization was organized as soon as Philadelphia was voted the Convention in Los Angeles in July. Membership is open to all readers of stf and fantasy and will cost one dollar. For this one dollar members will receive all pre-convention booklets and propaganda—also a copy of the Convention Program booklet, which, of course, will contain names of all members of the Philcon Society—they who have contributed materially to the success of the Convention.

Philadelphia in 1947!

ROBERT A. MADLE, Secretary, PSFS.

1366 E. Columbia Ave.,
Phila. 25, Pa.

FOR THE GIRLS

I have coined a new word to describe the feminine reader of fantasy: It is "wo-fan". This letter is an announcement to all wofen of my fanne-magazine, Black Flames. The title honors Stanley Weinbaum's immortal character, Margaret of Urbs. "The Black Flame".

I will send a sample of my first issue to any interested F.F.M. reader for a 3c stamp. It contains an article by F.F.M.'s own editor, Mary Gnaedinger. The other contributors are Abby Lu Ashley, Doris Currier, Virginia Lelake, Fay Dishington, Helen Dewey and Jonne Evans. Tigrina has written the feature story, about Roxana, the Invisible Girl.

In my second issue Forrest Ackerman's grandmother "tells all" about how her famous grandson first became interested in fantasy; and I have material by Marijane Nuttall, Tigrina and Ernestine Taylor. Black Flames No. 2 will cost 15c to wofen and 20c to curious males.

Here's a break for the men. My companion magazine, *Wolf Fan*, will be 10c for masculine

(Continued on page 111)

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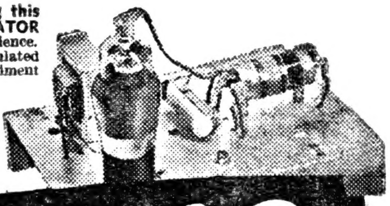

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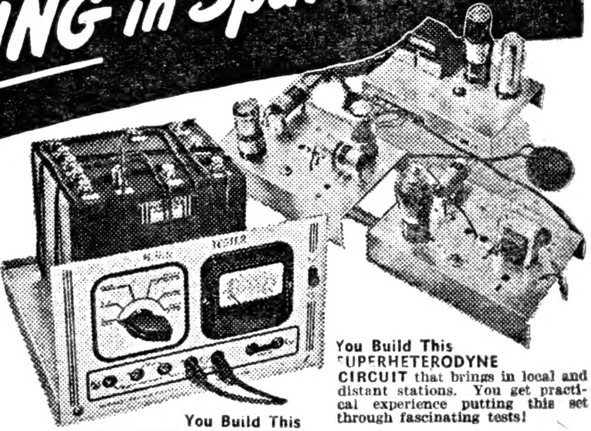

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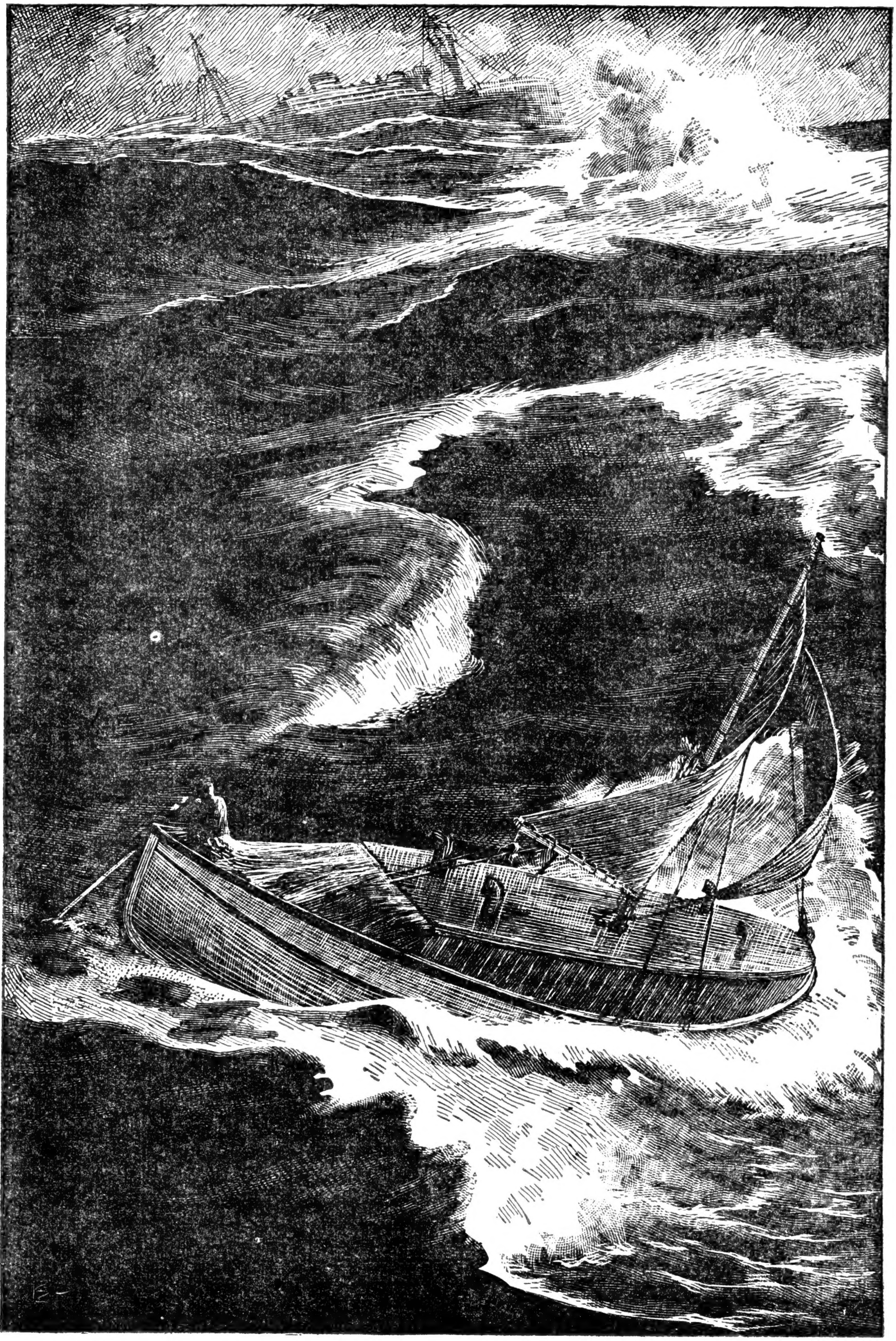

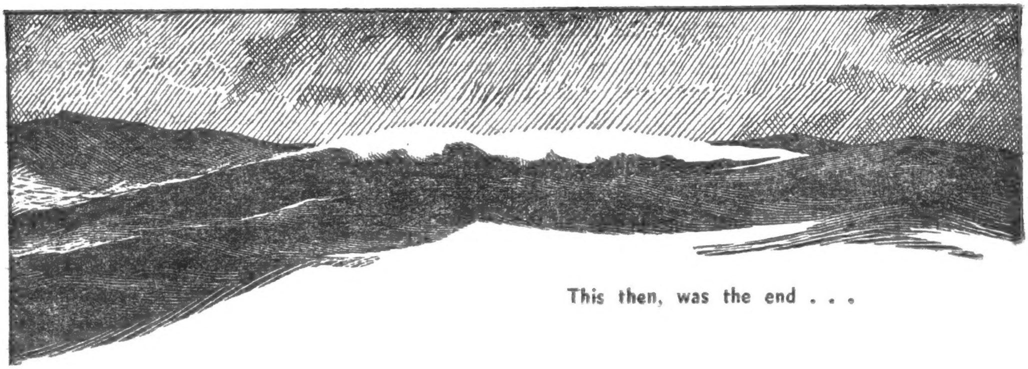

This then, was the end . . .

UNTHINKABLE

By

Francis Sibson

An outcast ship on a lost horizon, she sailed toward her strange rendezvous with the dead—the ghost vessel which had fought back from the legends of the past—to find no world left to hear her story!

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW LAND

IT WAS one of those days of calm summer brightness which live long afterwards in the memories of all who have ever known the Antarctic.

The warm white sun shone down from a sky that had not a single cloud in all its vastness. The sea breathed quietly, in repose, as if basking in the day, its long, gently-rounded swells darkened here and there by lazily-fanning wind-zephyrs.

But the air was zestfully alive, alert with a glorious keen tang that brimmed the lungs at every breath.

The grand ultramarine of the sea was set with occasional diamonds of ice, minutely clear in the clean sharp light. Isolated floes, these! The main pack was farther north, blown away from the polar continental seaboard by the gales of the spring break-up.

Down from the barque's lookout, with that unhurried but agile ease which tells of long familiarity, swung a thickset figure in fearnought trousers and fisherman's jersey. The only distinguishing mark he wore was a peaked cap, pulled slightly askew over his forehead, with a soiled white cover and a Royal Cape Yacht Club badge all green with verdigris. But that meant little enough, since the club had made every man aboard the Springbok an honorary member on the day of her commissioning, back there in Table Bay Docks.

The trappings of rank, however, had never meant much to John Dane. The stamp of command was plain enough on him without them.

Dane had been nearly three hours in "the top," but there was little in his dark, and at first glance rather heavy, features to show the strain of crucially expectant uncertainty from which he, the leader of the South African Antarctic Expedition, had just been freed. His face never did re-

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veal much of his inward feelings. Its "heaviness" would indeed have been called almost ox-like but for the slight softening of quiet humor in the wide and firm-lipped mouth—and the bright gray intelligence of his eyes.

He came aft now along the main-deck and, watching him from the poop, in front of the little white wheelhouse, a big gray-haired Viking in a pilot-coat nodded to himself and smiled under his whitening mustache. They were old friends, these two; comrades of long standing.

Beyond a certain quiet confidence of bearing—infallible sign of one who has seen and learned and lived at first-hand—the casual onlooker would have guessed nothing from Dane's appearance; but Captain Rattray had already learned that the first objective of the *Springbok's* quest had been reached.

Dane swung himself up the starboard poopladder and halted at its head, his feet set wide on the planking, his hands in his trousers pockets, his face transfigured by a slow and cheerful grin.

Rattray grinned back, like a contented cat. Thus, after their own inarticulate fashion, did these two greet the hour of their achievement—an hour for which both had striven (in common with every other man aboard) through many arduous, anxious days.

"It's land all right," said Dane at last. "Thought we'd pick it up soon, the way the soundings have been shoaling. Mostly ice-cliffs, by the look of it, but you can see a few bits of mountains sticking up behind 'em here and there, just as the *Discovery* chaps reported. We'll carry on as we are till we're a couple of miles off, then we'll turn east and do a bit of coasting, and find a place to land."

"Bet you anything you like," said the captain, "that, if we turn east, we'll find afterwards that we'd have found a place sooner if we'd turned *west.*"

Dane chuckled. "I know. But if I had said 'turn west' you would have said just the same thing about turning east. What I like about you, Rats old lad, is your unfailing optimism. . . . All the same, I wish we had a plane. She'd find out for us in two twos. As it is, since we can't turn both ways at once, we'll try to the east'ard."

So, under the power of her single diesel-engine, the auxiliary barque *Sprinkbok* closed the land ahead. Her steel-shod prow flashed in the sunlight as it breasted those translucent swells, for it still held much of the polish that the ice had given it, farther north, in her slow-ramming progress through the pack.

Her propeller left a smoothly-whorling trail of pale blues and glimmering bottle-greens behind her, a trackway that was strange to the curiously swooping sea-birds, for never before had this land been approached by the ships of men. Years ago it had been *sighted* from the crow's-nest of the *Discovery,* Scott's famous ship, but nothing more! She had come painfully, battling along the northern outskirts of densely impassable pack-ice.

The *Springbok,* more fortunate than her predecessor, had met the ice-pack farther to the northward, detached from the land; and though it had delayed her earlier, she had gained the recompense of a wider stretch of open water behind.

The *Springbok* had come expressly to chart this land, if land it were.

At least, that was Ransome's idea. Ransome was the geographist and hydrographer and, having been born within sight of that Yorkshire moor on whose summit stands England's memorial obelisk to one Captain Cook, it was perhaps natural that some of that old-time explorer's spirit should have got into his blood.

Paton, on the other hand, regarded the charting as a matter altogether subsidiary to the much more practically useful study of Antarctic meteorology. A scientist from the Witwatersrand University, little Paton would explain with convincing detail—if given the opportunity—just how infallibly the systematic examination, on the spot, of antarctic continental weather conditions would enable the Union Government Department to predict, for years ahead, the endless but irregular alternations of flood and drought which had hitherto made the life of the South African farmer so hazardously interesting. His eyes glowed now as he contemplated this final consummation to all his years-long hopes and plannings.

Whitehead, the airman, was a little bitter about the whole matter. There should have been a monoplane aboard the *Springbok* but, at the last moment "funds had been lacking." Being determined, however, not to be left behind on that account, he had come without the machine, but with a promise that the *Springbok* would carry a plane *next* season. In the meantime he was here "to study the conditions"—as he put it officially. In actual fact he was here because nothing could stop his coming.

There were, naturally, other specialists aboard; and they could all be just as convincing as Paton about the paramount importance of their respective fields of research. Professor Kildale, thin and sardonically incisive, had come all the way from Sydney to find out what the blackish peaks beyond the ice were made of. Young Dr. Hamilton, of the South African Marine Biological Survey, would not have cared very much if they had sighted no land at all—as long as he was allowed to drop or tow his grabs and drags and plankton-nets and collect, in corked and carefully sterilized bottles, his innumerable specimens and samples of sea-water and sea-bottom; while the benevolently bed-side manner in which, periodically, he took the ocean's temperature was a sheer joy to behold.

WHILE readily prepared to admit the sterling scientific and quite possibly even practical value of all these things, John Dane (a Lieutenant-Commander of the Royal Naval Reserve) surveyed the absorbed enthrallment of their respective devotees with a large and good-humored impartiality. His impartiality—the first and most essential requisite for sound leadership in any scientific expedition—had the advantage of being quite genuine: he smiled on them all because all were equally useful.

Standing beside the gyro-compass-repeater, at this fateful moment, he looked an impressive figure despite the shortness of his stature: impressive because he was so utterly unaware of it; for here was a graduate with honors in a science that no university can teach. No man can learn true leadership: it must be in him from the first.

"You'll be wanting to close up your survey party in about half an hour," he warned Ransome presently. "We'll be starting coasting as soon as we're near enough for you. Say! Pearson! How are the soundings going?"

"Three hundred and forty fathoms, *Ou Baas,*" came the second officer's voice in reply. He was watching the indicator of the supersonic sounder, inside the chart-house; and he used a form of address that had arisen naturally and inevitably. One does not say "sir!" to such a man as Dane. It is too formal. And in such a company as this there is a comradeship between man and man, irrespective of position, to which most of the formalities of quarter-deck or office-stool are quite alien. But there is always respect, and must be, wherever it is due and has been earned. The Afrikaans *Ou Baas* is used towards any one who is loved and honored for what he is. There is no real English equivalent for it, and any attempt at literal translation would merely obscure the true meaning, would indeed kill the very soul of it.

"Shoaling rapidly; I thought so," said Dane to himself. "Have you fixed our position this morning, Skipper?"

"Nine-fifteen. Walters and I," answered Rattray.

"Good. You can take sights again when the run starts. . . . I think Pearson had better go up to the nest now. I hardly think we're *likely* to find a good landing-place straight away, but we mustn't miss any chances."

Pearson had heard, and came out from the chartroom to obey without need of any repetition. Apart from the somewhat "hard-bitten" cast of his young and sea-tanned face—he had come to the *Springbok* from one of the whaling companies based on Durban—the seamanlike alertness of his bearing would have singled him out in any ordinary ship's company. Here, however, the company was not at all ordinary: it never is in an Antarctic expedition, where every man is and must be hand-picked—by a connoisseur of human vintages. They were all above the normal; and also, of necessity, a little abnormal as well.

Ransome had come up to the poop a little before. He was a large man, though loose-limbed and apt to "shamble"; rather a "heather-mixture" type. One instinctively visualized him walking over one of those moors amid which he had been born, in a Norfolk jacket and a cap, with a rank old pipe and a dog. He would be in charge of the running-survey that was about to begin. A hydrographer's job; so Dane had characteristically left the details of its planning to Ransome. It was never his habit to try and do everything himself.

"How have you arranged it?" he asked now—and this again was typical of Dane. A trusted subordinate likes to feel that his chief is interested in his plans—after they have been made.

Ransome took his pipe from his mouth and instinctively straightened himself.

"The depth-finder will be going all the time, doing its own recording. I've arranged the rest by watches. Officer-of-the-watch to take four-point bearings of all peaks and headlands and glaciers and whatnots—I've written it all out—and he'll sing out 'fix!' as he gets each bearing. Then he finds their altitude at once by sextant;

and when we hear the 'fix' we get their distance by range-finder. We'll want a hand standing by to ready the patent-log each time, of course; and I think that gives us everything."

"Yes; that's fine," commented Dane. "Unless the weather forces us out to sea for an offing we'll be able to carry right on with it till we land. Of course you understand that the ship can only survey up till then? By the time we've found a place, and got all our stores ashore, she probably won't have too much time to spare for getting back."

This was a point that was to cause them all no little anxiety in the days to come. After landing the shore-party the *Springbok* was to return to Capetown for the winter, coming back the next spring with fresh supplies and—with luck—Whitehead's autogiro-plane. In any event she could not winter here—it was considered too risky. She might be nipped in the pack, whose pressures can be very deadly—as Shackleton's *Endurance* found—away down in the Weddell Sea.

Shackleton had hoped that his ship would always slip upward from between the closing ice-jaws, like a pip between finger and thumb, then lie a-top, in safety, till the pressure eased and she could drop back to her own element again—as ships had done before, in northern seas. But the approaches to the northern pole are different. They are strewn with chaotic islands and land-masses, which do much to break the force of the pack. Down south there are only a few insignificant specks of land within the globe-girdling belt of ocean and, in winter, the huge floating mass of ice is pressed and rammed in upon itself by the forces of warring and almost incessant gales, over enormous areas. The *Endurance* had been caught by ice-pressure from *three* sides, and she had been squashed like a fly.

Dane was taking no chances. He was naturally anxious, then, to find as soon as possible a suitable place for landing—a place where, without danger or undue interruption from the weather, they could disembark enough food, equipment, fuel and building-materials to house and maintain, for a whole year at least, a party of nearly a score of men.

"What's the shore looking like, Pearson?" he shouted up now to the crow's-nest.

The ex-whaler looked down over the after edge of the barrel. "Nothing but ice-cliff so far," he hailed back. "Looks a bit more broken to the east'ard, Ou Baas, but I can't see anything but ice on the shore-line even there."

"How far would you say we were off now?"

"About six miles."

"We'll carry on for another half-hour then. My guess was about right," commented Dane, turning again to Ransome. "Then we'll alter course to the east'ard, keeping along the shore, and you can start away."

The program was duly carried out. And all that day they went on, under power, their course roughly east-by-south, parallel with the land; very busy with Ransome's work and Hamilton's drag-netting, but otherwise without incident. At intervals Dane himself would watch again from the crow's-nest; but nowhere did he see any practicable landing. The shore went slowly past, silent and white and utterly inhospitable, for the most part a precipitous "barrier" that might even have been afloat in places—like the Ross Sea Barrier, the other side of the world, a "coast" of floating ice that extends out hundreds of miles to the northward of any real land.

The ice-cliffs here looked almost old enough to be the age-scarred edges of the ancient but now much shrunken continental ice-cap itself—which once covered all Antarctica in one vast universal glacier. And sometimes the *Springbok,* passed by the projecting feet of living glaciers, slow-thrusting from the high lands behind—as once the one great ice-cap had thrust, but on a far smaller scale—ice-tongues whose ends broke off at intervals in thunderous "calvings," which settled with vast foamings and radiating waves, to float away as bergs.

In other places the watchers saw the sea's margin all tumbled and fantastic with upturned and stranded floe, cemented together into a chaotic unity by the frozen spray that the glass had left. But not once, that day, did they sight so much as a rock or bowlder or glimpse of honest earth along this gelid shore-line; though behind and above it the land appeared darkly here and there, projecting stonily grim, like the bones of a dead thing showing where its winding-sheet had rotted.

Yet there was life here, and life abundant. The calm sea teemed with it: there were more fish than penguin and seal could destroy, more seals than the ferocity of the insatiable killer-whales might exterminate—and the penguins were too agile in the water, it seemed, to be caught at all. Dainty, inquisitive Adelie and lordly Emperor they were; and from the rookeries of the former, sprawled over such stony patches of uncovered land as they could find, high up above the ice-beaches, came a clamor that in the still air reached often to the ship as she passed them steadily by. Skua gulls flew and swam about her, crying their harsh welcome in the intervals of stealing their hard-won meals from the penguins; yes, there was life enough here, for the sea gave it.

But when, next season, Whitehead should take his plane and fly away there into the south, leaving the sea behind, the domain of death itself, utter and petrified, would lie before him. A whole continent of it, where, if they would see it and live, men must carry with them every single means of barest existence save water alone —and for that they must take fuel, to melt it from the snow.

For only the wind lives there; only the drift and the glacier have motion. A land very terrible, not to be lightly sought.

Yet with a strange allurement!

THAT evening—a "clock-time" evening, for the sun did not set—there was a celebratory dinner in the saloon, with another one for'ard among the men.

For those officers and scientists off-duty, there were the easy chairs around the stove and, of course, the wireless. Marconi House had given them one of the latest receivers, an instrument of remarkable delicacy and, as they settled down to enjoy themselves for the evening, they heard the deep-roaring strokes of Big Ben come thrilling across the world to them. One or two of them blinked a little, dim-eyed for a moment with the ever-fresh wonder of the linking call of it.

But the wordless spell was soon broken: a dance-band had begun to stamp and blare in Piccadilly, and the feet of the South African Antarctic Expedition beat out the time of it, thousands of miles away.

A little elevated, perhaps, by the wine that had helped mark that day's achievement, Pearson took Dr. Hay (late Surgeon-Commander R. N. and normally as sedately urbane as a diplomat) in the crook of his strong sea arm and danced with him. The others cheered, and some of them joined in. Even Paton was roused enough from his presumably meteorological reverie to observe that the exercise would at least help keep the doctor in condition for wintering—Hay being ear-marked for the shore-party.

Young Meldrum, the ship's medico, who was accompanying the music with an imaginary trombone, broke off to remark that exercise was an exploded fetish—like cold baths—whereupon Hills, the third officer, proceeded with many expressions of shocked disgust to give him one—out of the water-jug on the table.

Dane himself looked on from over the covers of a tattered back-number of *Blackwood's,* in a quietly affectionate amusement.

The emphatic rhythm of the music snapped off in mid-step. Knibbs, their electrical expert and radio-operator, who could never leave well alone, was twirling at the knobs of the instrument. The thing gave forth a grating, like the soft grinding of frustrated teeth; whooped suddenly like a schoolboy, then whistled with a gravely reflective surprise whose weird contrast sounded irresistibly comic. And although, of course, every one of them had heard these radio noises hundreds of times before, they listened and laughed now as though at a part of the entertainment. They were out to enjoy themselves this evening; they intended to miss nothing: nowhere else on the globe could there have been keener or more appreciative listeners.

". . . characterization," said a loud voice, startlingly abrupt and decisive, like some god in Outer Space addressing an irresponsibly refractory planet. "Indeed, they are little more than the wearisome puppets of what has rather aptly been termed the fiction of the assembly-line. And the anachronistic obsession of this—er—very youthful play is: that uncivilized and almost primitively animal attribute which the less-enlightened generations of the past regarded as patriotic heroism—and which was forever displaced from its ill-merited pedestal on that great day of our time when the nations once and for all degraded the once-proud cult of arms to the level of mere coastguards and police! So it is not to be expected that the creatures of the—er—doubtless also very youthful writer's imagination should even approximate to the real and breathing people of this saner world of to-day.

"His choice of scene is equally unreal and reactionary. We are expected to accept the possibility of a recrudescence—presumably in the not-too-distant future—of the exploded cult of the war-machine: and this quite regardless of the fact that the march of human progress has put irrevocably behind it the sort of mentality which could produce the sort of situation described.

"His 'heroes,' too, are the officers and men who operate a sample of that intricate machinery which used to be devised for the killing and maiming of their brethren. We are introduced, in short, to a battleship of the 'British Navy'—and the only concession to present-day facts of life which this pitiful posturer allows us is that he has made his deplorable death-engine an *aerial* battleship.

"On second thought we are uncertain whether this be a 'concession' or indeed the last and deadliest of all his insults to the playgoer's intelligence. We can, at a pinch, just bear with the impossibility of his—er—brave and sentimentally patriotic marionettes, with which he has elected to people his juggernaut and his story; but that our—"

"Here! Knibbs! What the deuce are you giving us? Switch the fellow—"

"No—leave him alone!" countered Meldrum. "It's *fun*. I *always* liked listening to love-and-brotherhood-ties being loving and brotherly about any one who doesn't agree with them."

"Quiet!" This from Whitehead the airman. "I want to hear about this flying battleship!"

"—as every one knows," they heard, as the boomingly unnatural voice of the broadcaster becoming audible again, "our great and growing network of air-services has cut right across the bad old frontiers of narrow nationalism, and this hastened the dawn of true world-understanding—*click*. Whoo-oo-*ooh!*"

The incorrigible Knibbs was busy with the controls again.

"Jimmy Barnes versus Magnus for the European Middle-weights," explained Knibbs. "I'd forgotten about it till Pearson reminded me. I'm afraid we've missed the first round."

Amid the blended uproar of the huge London audience there sounded one dominating voice, but at first they could not hear its words.

Then, as Knibbs got the adjustments more accurately, it rose and swelled full-toned.

". . . An upper cut to the left of the jaw," it observed with crescendo relish, above a thousand-throated shout of delight. "Magnus is down!"

There was sudden silence, both in the distant hall and the *Springbok's* listening saloon. Through that tense quiet came another voice, like Fate itself, counting: one . . . two . . . three . . . four— *Time!*"

Amid the roars of exultant relief from the supporters of Magnus—and the higher-pitched, disappointed yells of the Barnes faction—the first voice was heard announcing the end of the round.

Tyson, the second engineer, assured Pearson that his bet with Mr. Walters was practically won.

THERE was some further discussion, stilled by the announcement of the third round. Jimmy Barnes lasted for three more ere the fighting-skill of his older opponent put him down for the traditional count; whereupon his crestfallen Antarctic backer swore the manly oath of a sportsman whose purse has been lightened.

"Tch! Whoop! Krrk-anco-Italian dispute," confided one of the news-services. "The Italian Minister of Interior and Communications is meeting Monsieur Longmarten privately tomorrow at Locarno. It is hoped that a resumption of their conversations will clear the air for negotiations which should enable the two countries to arm their delegates with the necessary mandates to enable further discussions to proceed with a view to the exploration of any possible avenue which may lead to a way out from the present deadlock. In the meantime the French company announces a curtailed flying-boat service, made possible by the cooperation of Imperial Airways, to link up with Jugo-Slavian, Near and Far Eastern sections.

"Negotiations are still proceeding between Sir Andrew Lockwood and the Angora delegation regarding the Arab demand for the return of Palestine to Turkey. The *Manchester Guardian* correspondent denies the rumors recently circulated concerning the Russian part in the agitation—"

"I suppose it all means something," sighed Tattant, one of Paton's scientific assistants. "But can't we have something a bit more intelligible?"

"What do you mean, intelligible?" demanded Paton. "My dear chap, do you want to go back to the bad old days of secret diplomacy? D'you want to destroy a promising new industry?"

"This subsidy business," Captain Rattray broke in with seeming irrelevance, "isn't straight!"

"What subsidy business?" asked Kildale patiently.

"Aircraft. That brotherhood-merchant was letting off his face about it. It's all wrong. I don't care what he says."

"How d'you mean, Skipper? It's all open and above board, isn't it?"

"Oh, Lord, yes! That's the trouble. We've all got so used to things not being straight that nobody even notices any more. But look here. The air-lines have never paid their way, they don't pay their way now, and I can't see how they ever will. Well, if *they* don't pay, who does? And why? That's what I want to know."

"Taxpayers. Everybody. It's progress," pointed out Kildale quite kindly. "You've *got* to pay for progress."

"If you've got to pay more for it than it pays back—well, it's a funny kind of progress, that's all! We didn't have to pay for the railways, did we? They ran on their own wheels."

"Tally-ho!" shouted Knibbs, and the hunt went into full cry after this new hare.

"How many of us really need all this dashing about in aircraft?" demanded the captain. "About one in a thousand—"

"And we're the one," interjected Whitehead, "so of course we don't *get* it—not till next season, anyway."

"One in a thousand," pursued Rattray firmly. "But the whole blessed lot of us have to put our hands in our pockets to pay for it, whether we want to or not. That's what I'm getting at. It isn't straight, and if it isn't straight it can't last."

"But how else can we go ahead? You've *got* to try these things out, and give them a chance. Whitey here wouldn't get his plane even next season if it wasn't for that. The world's got to go forward, and—"

"It's going forward so fast that it'll trip over itself one o' these days—"

"But you can't put the clock back—" began Kildale.

"I *knew* somebody'd say that!" complained Tarrant.

"No, but you can have a look at the *right* time now and then, and make a serious attempt to *regulate* the darn thing!" said Meldrum.

"Look at the people the airways employ! What'd happen to *them*, if—"

"Ought to be doing something else a bit more useful—something that *can* pay for itself. You could defend *anything* with that argument. Build a dam all around the Atlantic and pump it out. Look at all the people *that* would employ—"

"I think I see what the Skipper's trying to get at," said Dr. Hamilton. "I remember a fellow coming up to my office once. Said he wanted to start a sardine fishing and canning industry at Mossel Bay. He was going to employ about a hundred people all told. Said it would be a great thing for Mossel Bay. But he couldn't make it pay unless he could get a whacking import-duty slapped on Norwegian and French sardines first. Would I see the Minister about it? . . .

"I told him the white population of South Africa was a million and three quarters. Did he seriously want us to make a million and three quarter people pay twice as much as before whenever they wanted to eat sardines, so as to give him and a hundred others a job? But he couldn't see it that way. Said we *ought* to have our own industries. Said I wasn't patriotic. Went off spluttering to see his M. P. As likely as not he'll get his import-duty too."

"But that's reducing the whole thing to an absurdity!" protested Kildale amid the laughter. "All I'm saying—"

"It's what the world's doing, all the same," interposed Paton. "And, talking about that, here's a thing *I* want to know. When people are all lumped together in committees, or mobs, or parliaments, or nations, why do they go off and do things that any one of 'em, sitting down to think 'em out quietly, would see at once were all rot? It's always happening—"

"Mob psychology?" queried Dr. Hay, leaning forward a little. "It's true enough—perfectly well known. Doesn't matter where the crowd is, or what it's doing, either. Same thing, whether it's a riot or a revival meeting. We're funny creatures, you know. We don't understand *ourselves* yet. The only exception," he added slowly, "seems to be a crowd under discipline—"

"That's all very well," put in Kildale keenly, "but how would you define discipline?"

"Discipline? The *real* sort?" interposed John Dane quietly, looking up from his *Blackwood's*. "Simply organized commonsense. Mere Euclid: the whole is greater than the part; what's best for the whole is best for every part of it. You're right, Doc—a disciplined crowd *is* the exception to your mob-psychology, and that's why. It wouldn't panic, for instance, in a burning building, and get all jammed up in the exits because everybody was trying to get out first and to hell with everybody else."

"A lot of it's because we can't help ourselves," said Kildale. "Take this aircraft subsidy business. We all do it because the others do, and nobody wants to get left behind. Like women in houses. Mrs. Nextdoor has new curtains—we must have 'em. Doesn't matter whether we can afford 'em or not. . . ."

"Yes—to help the curtain-industry!" snapped Rattray. "No woman would dare tell her husband that yarn—but we get it served up to us every day in the papers. Does any one really know, nowadays, what *anything's* for, why *anything's* ever done? . . . Is there any one here who could make head or tail of all that stuff from Geneva to-night? Was there any normal fellow anywhere who ever could? If we ever do get told the truth about anything nowadays it's always so tangled up that nobody can understand it! Lord help us all, why? Take us by ourselves—any of us—any nation, anywhere—we've all got *some* common-sense. Can see as far through a brick wall as most. . . . But as soon as we start meeting together in mobs to tackle anything *big,* we all seem to go off our heads at once, and do the most obviously idiotic things—and everything gets so tangled up with everything else that nobody knows where they are and they get sick of trying to find out and just let it slide. . . ."

The leader thrust out his legs straight in front of him, burrowed back in his easy chair, stretched his arms over his head and yawned. He knew Rattray to the core; he knew how that brain of his would seize on a thing, and chew upon it, driving itself sometimes to a point not far short of a mental frenzy—and the bigger and more impersonal the thing the harder it gripped him.

Yes; John Dane knew just how real and genuine were the captain's storms of the brain, how utterly he could be caught up and overwhelmed and even exhausted by such useless, endless queryings.

"Well, chaps," he said, "*we* can't very well do anything about it, so I propose we let it slide too. The skipper can give us a lecture about it in winter quarters. Call it 'The Planet That Lost Its Way'—"

"And kidded itself it hadn't," interposed Meldrum, "by hiring people to tell it that losing its way would be unthinkable. Good idea. I'll collaborate, Skipper. We'll tell the world just where it gets off. And if it won't listen to us, then it can just take the consequences!"

"That's right!" said Dane. "Treat it rough. In the meantime I'm turning in."

There was rarely need for more than a hint from John Dane. In five minutes the saloon was empty but for himself and the still slightly ruffled captain.

They went on deck for a last look at the weather before going to their bunks. The sky overhead was all a translucence of clear green. Skimming just above the southern horizon, the level sun shone like a furnace of cold light into their tired eyes. The heavens of the north had caught redly alight from its rays. A far berg on the sea-rim to the nor'west stood out sharply green-purple against that redness.

The ship lay heaving gently, her three masts swinging in stately cadence across the Infinite, ponderous with their yards and the furled canvas on them. A warm wave of affection for her rose up in both men as they watched her from the poop. Staunch and sound to the heart of her, she had carried them here in safety and even some comfort. What a boon her sails were!

"Even in these days," Dane commented, looking up at the tracery of rigging, "there are still times and places where the old things are good to know."

Both men were silent for a time, both, doubtless, filled with thoughts too deep for words.

"Peaceful, isn't it?" said Dane, at length.

"It's—beautiful," murmured Rattray. "Quiet. Look at those colors."

Again silence.

"Weather *looks* all right," said Dane.

"It's good at doing that," grunted Rattray.

In that moment even Kildale might have understood, at least in some measure, why it was that this grizzled ship-master could take nothing—not even Progress—for granted.

The Antarctic had blasted in that lesson, through many hazardous years.

CHAPTER II

THE ANTARCTIC LAUGHS

"THIS is getting a bit anxious, you know, Pater."

"Exasperating, Ou Baas," agreed the meteorologist.

"Season isn't getting any earlier either," growled Captain Rattray. "What with all that time lost getting through the pack, and now this on top of it. . . . If we'd only had that plane. . . . No good chancing a landing in just any sort of place, especially with the sort of weather we've been getting. This is the worst bit of seaboard I've ever struck down in these parts. It doesn't seem to *want* us."

For nearly a fortnight the *Springbok* had been working eastwards along the coast, still seeking that spot where they could safely make their landing, their survey many times interrupted by the onset of northerly weather—for the north was the dangerous quarter, making the whole coast a lee shore, from which they had to turn seaward at once, at each threat, for a safe offing.

These northerly winds came sudden and strong, often driving in before them masses of loose-packed ice, in floes of varying ages and thickness, which made the ship's struggle out to windward all the harder. Once she had been almost nipped between this incoming pack and the ice-cliffs of the land itself. She had wedged her way between the floes, with all her men out on them with warps, bursting into a providential lane of clearer water that had mysteriously opened beyond.

Now, on this the thirteenth day of their much-hindered coasting, Dane stood with these others on the poop, considering the position. Rattray wanted to get the landing over and done with; he was worried about getting his ship north past the limits of pack—through the crucial part of his return-voyage to the Cape—before the season should become too late. In this plea of urgency Paton joined him: he feared that if they did not make their landing soon he and his assistants and all the material and equipment for his long dreamed-of weather observatory

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would have to be carried back to civilization with hardly anything accomplished.

"It's going to take us five days of *un*interrupted work to get everything ashore," Dane pointed out. "But we've not found a single place yet where it could be done with any hope of even fifty per cent safety. It's too big a risk. If we hazard the ship like that we'll lose her, and even if we managed to get everything ashore before we lost her, it would finish the expedition. The cost of another ship—even a temporary one for next season only, cutting out all work after that—would just about ruin the show. I've got to think of that. It was hard enough, and took long enough, to get the thing voted at all—"

"Science never did catch votes," agreed Paton with a raw edge to his voice. "If it did, we'd have had the plane and might have been landed weeks ago." The waiting had got thoroughly on his nerves by now.

"Well, we've got to do the best we can with what we *have* got, that's all," commented Dane. "What's your utmost limit, Skipper? I'll abide by your decision there."

"Another ten days. To the time I start north, I mean," said Rattray. "I've thought it out and thought it out till I'm tired, and that's all I can give you."

"Then at the very most we've got five more days to find a landing. Call it three. Right. If we can't start unloading in three days, back we go. And no one'll be sorrier than I shall," he added, turning to the scientist. The latter swallowed, then nodded without a word. There was nothing he could say.

But as so often happens in the Antarctic, on the very next day, just before the end of the first watch, in the beginning of the short mid-night dusk which now divided day from day, their luck turned. The long-drawn pageant of sunset had ended, except for a dull red glowing in the south, as of distant fires glaring behind a great opacity of smoke and steam, the sky was of a dully even gray. The coast lay darkly silhouetted against that weird afterglow, a scant mile away; a short, steep, spray-dusted popple of a sea was running under a bitter off-shore wind.

But at least that wind had blown all floating ice clear away to the nor'ard. That was its one redeeming feature, thought Mills, third officer, as he stamped up and down, elephantine in his many-layered clothing, his oilskins a-top of all. One did not have to watch out for floes.

The *Springbok* was snoring along under fore and main tops'ls, with the driving power of the spanker to balance them on the mizzen; and she was very steady, the wind pressing her over to a moderate angle of some eleven degrees.

A low, snub-nosed promotory began to open out ahead from the shore-line. It looked like the usual ice; probably, by the lie of the land behind it, the foot of a glacier. Of these they had passed numbers, but none of any great size, nor had any of them projected for any great distance into the sea, the soundings having been too steep-to to give the ice any support. All seemed to "calve-off" close in to the cliffs.

As soon as this "headland," which they now approached, bore four points on the bow there would be the normal four-point bearing to take. The "survey-party" took stations. Whitehead climbed to the range-finder on the charthouse roof and stood waiting there, flapping his arms across his chest like an old-time cabman; one of the seamen of the watch moved aft to the patent log.

"Steady on your course," said Mills to the helmsman in the wheelhouse, then joined the airman "up-top" and took the cover off the "standard" or navigating-compass-repeater.

Under her easy canvas the *Springbok* was steering steadily enough. The compass-card hardly veered a degree either way of the lubber's-line at its edge. Mills swung the bearing-sight ring till the prism reflected the correct angle from the course, and waited.

"Fix!" he sang out presently, noting the time by deck watch: and seizing his sextant, he read off the altitude.

"One mile four cables," reported Whitehead.

"Sixty-seven point nine on the log," said the seaman, looking up at them.

Mills wrote it all down and waited.

TWO, three, four minutes.

The headland was drawing abeam. The land which opened to sight from behind it seemed unusually far and dim. It looked, by George, as though there might be some sort of a bay beyond this ice-tongue!

Five minutes!

Might be a bay? There *was* a bay!

Mills put his finger joyfully on the push which rang Dane's cabin-bell, his other hand on Rattray's—and it was a long, compelling, triumphant ring he gave them. Then back to the compass, standing by for the beam-bearing.

"Seven minutes twenty-four seconds," he worked out the time from the last bearing.

"Nine cables point—er—just on point nine," said Whitehead.

"Seventy point nine on the log, sir."

Mills took the altitude again, then wrote out his figures.

"Almost exactly a mile off," he commented, "and the speed's eight knots and an onion. No current to speak of, by the look of it. I reckoned we'd be about—"

"Br-r-r!" came Dane's voice behind him. "Can't you arrange warmer weather for finding your harbors in, young Mills?"

"Sorry, Ou Baas," was the grinning reply. "Do we get sail off her and stand by the engine?"

"Stand by," confirmed the leader briskly. "Wait for the Skipper, though."

Half a minute later came Rattray, looking more like a contented cat than ever. A few minutes after that, the *Springbok's* nose swung up into the wind, in towards the bay, her planking quivering to the first coughing explosions of her diesel.

"Hand to the chains," said Rattray. "Get for'ard, Mills, and stand by to anchor. We won't call up Walters for that—let the chain wake him and give him a surprise. . . . We ought to have shelter from everything except north round to southeast, by the look of things, here."

"Aye," agreed Dane. "And as the worst of 'em don't seem to come much to the norard of nor'-nor'west, it looks rather promising. This'll cheer up old Pater a bit. Have you called Ransome?"

There was no need to send for the hydrographer. The starting of the engine had awakened him. He came running up even as the third officer went down to go for'ard to the foc's'le. And the chief officer shot up half-dressed from his cabin as the long undisturbed starboard bower-anchor swung out on its cat-davit. (Anchors inboard when under way, to keep them clear of ice.)

"Slow ahead," said Rattray.

"No bottom at twenty-five fathom, sir!" came from the man in the chains.

"Hope we'll find decent holding-ground," commented Dane. "What's the patent sounder say?"

The captain went in to look. The charted blue line on the paper had swung smoothly towards the zero-level. It was now reading twenty-eight and still rising. He went out again. He would rely on the hand-lead now. One had to know the nature of the bottom for anchoring, and the supersonic gear could not give him that; but the tallow "arming" in the foot of the handlead brought up actual samples.

"Deep eighteen!" sang out the leadsman presently; and then, after a pause as he hauled in: "Fine dark sand and mud, sir."

"Glacial deposit, I expect," said Dane.

"Dead slow!" from Rattray. "Stand by, for'ard!"

A pause. The ship slid slowly on, her exhaust drumming softly under the stern; the water was smoother now; and as they got more and more of the land's protection there came intervals of calm between the wind-gusts, and the latter lost more and more of their fury.

"Deep fourteen . . . fine sand, sir."

"Stop engines."

Silence but for the dwindling ripple under the bow.

"Mark ten . . . sand again, sir."

"Let go!"

The noise of the cable and the cheering of the watch, led by Rattray, brought the rest of her people from foc's'le and cabins. Roar upon roar echoed back from the land. An icy gust joined in that roaring, but even the douche of drifted snow that it brought could not dowse the *Springbok's* spirits now.

In the chartroom, with Ransome nodding approvingly over his shoulder, Dane was entering up the log.

"23 49," he wrote, stiff-fingered with the cold. "Came to, in ten fathoms, stbd anchor and 4 shackles, in Mills Bay."

THE place was as sheltered as could be expected of any haven on such a coast as this. Its main guardian was the bay's western extremity—the cape that Mills had first seen, jutting out almost due northeast to seaward for over a mile. Springbok Point they had named it; though actually, as the third officer had seen, it was the final ice-tongue of a glacier that came down slow-creeping from the heights of the hinterland, through a long valley between buttressing foothills.

So, at least, said Kildale, who knew the ways of glaciers. A mountainous hinterland there must be, to give source and downhill momentum to this river of ice; but it was hidden behind the lowering gray veil that was over all the southern sky.

Of the confining foothills which held the glacier between them, only the last few feet of their rocky and boulder-strewn summits were visible: the throat of the valley was full-choked with the ice, humped a little in its center and all ravaged with crevasses, like the vast rapids of some mighty flood, frozen in mid-careering by the petrifying eye of some southland gorgon.

"The ice-tongue's resting on a submerged moraine, I expect," amplified the geologist. "All glaciers pick up and shove a mass of stones and rubble along under 'em. You can see what's happened here. When the ice first reached the sea it would start to melt and break off and float away, and naturally it would drop out some of the stuff that had been embedded in its underside. So it has gradually built out a sort of launching-slipway under itself."

"Luckily for us," remarked Dane. "It makes a perfect, natural breakwater."

"Looks as if it doesn't start calving off, either, till it's crept right out," added Captain Rattray. "I had a good look at the foot of it as we came in. It can't be long since it calved last."

Kildale nodded. "Yes; it's practically a vertical cliff. Fairly fresh break."

They stood on a sheet of old ice that filled the angle between glacier-tongue and beach—and so obviously ancient was its worn and discolored surface that it might have been there a century.

Rattray had brought the ship in alongside its edge, as closely as he had dared, first securing her head and stern with anchors and then warping her in with hawsers to anchors on the ice itself, so that she was firmly held between them all.

The berth was ideal for discharging: the ice-sheet lay like a wharf beside her, well within reach of her derricks. Ten feet above the water rose that sheer "quay-wall" of ice; and below the water it went down straightly—as far as they could see—to a six-fathom bottom of sand and rubble.

The landing itself was going apace, with that smooth precision which can come only of much forethought. Their stuff had been loaded at Capetown in inverse order of importance, so that the most urgent items lay on top in the holds and were first to be unloaded.

As the three men watched, out swung the last of the bundles of planking that were destined for the walls and floor and inner lining of the "hut". Under the superintending eye of Andrew Mackworth, the ship's carpenter, and the ringing hammers of four enthusiastic amateur assistants, its framework was rapidly taking shape.

The spot Dane had chosen was on the upper beach, well beyond the fantastic spray-ice-fringe that was the telltale mark of the sea's highest limits of gale and tide; and the whole beach was a shelving fringe of boulders and gravel—the latter a dark commingling of granite and quartz and volcanic sand, promising dryness and good foundations. The ice-cliff which reared itself here along the beach-head, would give some protection from the winter blizzards; but, although firmly rooted in the gravel, the hut would also have to be secured like a tent, by wire guys taut-stretched from the roof to staunchly buried anchors, if it was to stand against the frenzies to be loosed about it in the months to come.

In a world where so much had to be left to the chances of little-known conditions—and the mercies of a quite unknowable fate—such measures against that world's malignity as might be foreseen at all must be long foreseen and well taken, with materials—and men—triple-tested for enduring strains most surely calculated.

While Dane and Kildale—presently joined by Paton—watched the discharging, Captain Rattray's keen old eyes took in the bay and its environs with a practical, stock-taking gaze that missed nothing. No one, of course, could have overlooked that rookery of Adelie penguins dappled and made raucous with its quarreling the flattish little tableland and tailing-slope of the nearer of the glacier's two confining ranges. The season being so far advanced, the eggs in their nests of pebbles had long since hatched; the young were half-grown by now; they and their parents moved up and down in ceaseless streams between their untidy home and the sea which was their food-store. And along the latter's chaotic margin of spray-ice and stranded floe were seals in plenty.

"You won't want for food, anyway," said Rattray.

"Well, we've got enough without 'em," answered Dane, waving a hand towards the first cases of stores that were now swaying out and down from the ship's derricks; "but you never know. Fellows have had to live on the country around them before now, and seal and penguin aren't to be despised. . . . Especially penguins . . . the seals are useful for fuel. . . .

We'll be trying Sykes' blubber-stove first chance, Pater," he added.

The little scientist nodded.

"If it's a success," he said, "it ought to help save our coal."

"Don't see why it shouldn't be," put in Rattray. "After all, it was tested out thoroughly enough before we left the Cape."

THE skipper looked now to the eastward, following the ice-cliff, under which the line of the bay till it swung out seawards again, three miles away, into a ruin of pressure where jammed floes thrown together by past convulsions of the winter pack or spring break-up, forced the cliff in upon itself to form a "pressure-ridge" of land-ice. This inchoate "headland" formed the further extremity of the inlet.

"The moment the wind looks like blowing in here I've got to get out of it," he pronounced. "And there won't be any time to waste either. If we started grinding and bumping and being forced against this ice-quay of ours it wouldn't do us any good at all. With the wind anywhere between east-sou'east and northeast the place'll be a perfect wave-trap. . . . Well, I'll be getting back aboard. Want to watch those wires. You wouldn't think it from here, but there's quite a 'run' on in this harbor."

He walked down to the wharf-edge and swung himself down the long gangway to the ship's busy deck. With an affectionate little twinkle in his eyes, Dane watched him go.

"Skipper seems to be worrying a bit," commented the meteorologist.

"Oh, he always does," answered Dane. "To hear him talk you'd think he simply hated the game. But he loves every minute of it really. It's just that he always likes to have a good sound look at the worst side of everything. If nothing happens he's pleasantly surprised; if something does—well, he's ready for it, you see."

After all, the captain did have some cause for worrying. On such a coast as this, to moor alongside an ice-wall, in an open bay, is not a thing that any orthodox shipmaster would do for choice. Rattray was not exactly orthodox—the Antarctic breeds its own special kind of seamanship—but he hankered, naturally enough, for the more normal anchorage they had taken on first entering this doubtful haven. There had at least been a little sea-room, a few hundred yards of grace between the ship and this grimly uncompromising land. Of course, with the instantly available diesel-engine to take her out, he could run for it in much better time, with much less warning, than would have been possible had she been a steamer with fires out or banked.

There was no help for it—he knew that well enough—if the landing was to be effected within the time-limit that he himself had laid down. To have kept the ship in her first anchorage would have meant discharging everything, most tediously, in her boats—a method which, even without any interruption from the weather, had risks of its own and would in any event have taken them far too long. To find a place where she could lie alongside to unload had been an almost vital necessity; one had to take *some* chances in this game. . . .

But the thing *looked* so utterly wrong, their temerity so dangerously foolhardy. A sudden shift of wind to the exposed quarter would make of this whole bay, as he had said, a trap for the incoming waves, a maelstrom of back-washing cross-seas from the ice-tongue. It would be a place wherein no ship could be safe for an hour—even if the wind did not also drive in before it a jam of floating ice to crush her against the land.

So, seamanlike, he worried and watched the weather; while the others, with an anxiety scarcely less than his, oversaw the landing of those precious crates and cases and piles of food and fuel and furnishings, of instruments, utensils, bedding, tents and personal gear. Each item must be listed and selected with all the care that forethought could command, to make up a whole that was to be the home, for many months, of seventeen men.

Almost as fast as the derricks could turn out and stack them on the ice, the man-hauled sledges took and drew them, with lusty will, up the already well-marked path to the hutsite.

The sun came out for a few moments, and the ice of glacier and cliff shone white against that lurid gray cloudbank of the south; white with shadowings of translucent greens and purples. Dark and minutely clear stood out the naked earth of hilltop and beach. The sheltered blue-green waters of the bay were alive with penguins and flying gulls. Half a mile away a killer-whale broke surface.

The black-painted hull of the ship, with its white deckhouses and surmounting tracery of masts and rigging, made a picture to charm the eyes of any one. The sudden sunlight glittered along the oiled spars of her derricks as they moved. The wind had eased greatly now, and the thudding of her oil-driven winch echoed back from cliff and glacier-tongue, a sound persistently humdrum, bringing even to this wild harborage something of the busy, commonplace air of dockland, plain and straight-forward, workaday—and secure.

A temporary delay in the afterhold, owing to a rope-sling having carried away, caused Tyson, the second engineer, to look about for some other job to keep his derrick at work in the meantime. The hut's wireless and electric-lighting plant, partly disassembled and packed complete in one big case, lay ready at hand on deck, abaft the main deckhouse, its wire lifting-strop already in place.

Knibbs was only too delighted at the thought of getting his own special charge put ashore. Like the other specialists, he was itching to start "settling down." He had been hovering about all morning, like one who has packed his luggage and waits to begin a journey.

Thus, jealously intent on the out-swinging bulk of his precious machinery, it was Knibbs who heard underfoot, from the ice-wharf on which he stood, a sound that might almost have been a sharp, incontinent little chuckle of anticipation.

The Antarctic's moment had come!

The big case was already swinging out and down. It landed with hardly a jar, for Tyson was an artist. But its weight alone was enough. With a noise like a thunderclap the ice—that ancient ice which had stood unmoved through no one knew how many years—split open!

It gaped menacingly under the electrician's very feet.

Tottering on the brink of the widening crack, he just managed to escape, throwing himself madly backwards. He lost his balance, sat down heavily—and remained there, *staring.*

Only a "small" piece, compared with the whole sheet, had broken away—about eighty feet long and thirty broad. At its outer edge, where the ship lay, it was nearly fifty feet thick. But its base did not quite reach down to the seafloor—this ice-sheet was, in fact, afloat along nearly all its sea-front edge—so that the sea had been able to flow in for some distance under it. And once beneath and hidden from sight, impelled by some conformation of the bottom, the sea-tides and currents had been very treacherously at work—for a very long time. Summer after summer the relative warmth of the moving water had eaten in and *upwards,* into the ice; and the ravages of those summers had not been repaired by the following winters, so that there had come a cave there, a submarine grotto.

IN TIME that grotto's roof had reached a height equal to the sea-level outside, and in some places several feet higher. Its greatest outer surface above, was some thirty feet in from the wharf-edge, and roughly parallel to it—along almost the whole length of the "cave." Here then was a "line of weakness" which had broken now; so that the whole of the broken-off piece between it and the *Springbok* was free of any support from the land-ice. The only support it had, therefore, was the buoyancy along its thick, deep seaward edge. It had got to turn turtle, to roll over, turning inwards on its axis, away from the *Springbok,* till it could float in equilibrium again—till the once-vertical seal-wall of it had swung nearly level to the sky.

On its old top, tight-gripping, were the ship's ice-anchors and their hawsers. But no hawsers, no ship, not half a dozen ships, could have held back that ponderous inward roll.

The ice-block turned, sliding the machinery-case from off its tilting surface into the long hidden water; then, with the increasing momentum of its thousands of solid tons, it drew taut the hawsers, wrapping them round itself, dragging at the *Springbok,* importuning her to come also. But, laid off on bow and quarter, fast gripping to the sea-bottom, the *Springbok's* outer anchors held her back.

Something had got to go.

The hawsers went. With reports like twin cannon-shots, and a back-lashing of frayed-out wire strands, hissing like a hundred snakes, the hawsers snapped. The ice rolled faster, freed now from its last restraint, its sea-face swinging upwards, the fifty-foot-deep bottom edge of it rising in a crescendo roar of displaced and whitened water—rising beneath the *Springbok's* keel. . . .

Less than five seconds from the first thunderclap, there came a second, dull and deep and dolorous, as that eighty-foot length of iron-hard ice crashed along the *Springbok's* bilge. It crushed in her planking, and the stout ribs behind, as though they had been cardboard backed by umbrella frames.

The *Springbok* reeled to the impact, her masts quivering like whips, giving forth a great groaning; reeled and hove up with the lift of the ice under her, still rolling; hove up and canted steeply, her upper part seaward, the stove-in underside of her gaping in the daylight. Then she began to slide sideways.

With a scream from her tortured keel, she plunged back into the water: a grisly launching of a ship that was a wreck already. The sea received her with a roar of white-lipped triumph.

The *Springbok* gulped and coughed. With half her flank smashed, she gulped water in, and, through her open hatchways, coughed out the air that the inrush displaced.

She leaned over . . . filled . . . settled . . . her masts drooping ever lower, till their yards touched the heaving sea.

And there she hung for perhaps one dreadful minute, her cluttered decks a jam of sliding gear and struggling men.

Dane watched spellbound, hardly daring to breathe. His heart struck cold within him; his face froze to a twisted, rigid mask. He felt numb and paralyzed.

He could have done nothing to help the men aboard her, even had he tried, for the impetus of that savage blow of the ice had thrust her out a clear thirty yards.

As Dane watched, at first without understanding, he saw Rattray, standing on the starboard wall of the charthouse with one hand on its roof-edge to steady him, pointing with the other and shouting. It was all as clear—and as unreal—as a picture-film.

With an odd slow stateliness, as if straightening from a last obeisance to the masters who had failed her, the *Springbok* rolled up to an even keel again, swung past it, and tilted drunkenly the other way, her masts sweeping great dripping arcs through the air.

The ice lay rocking gently alongside, nuzzling its victim with horrid grindings.

She was low on the sea, very low now; hardly two feet of her side showed above water.

She sank visibly as Dane watched, strake after beloved strake. . . .

Then he saw Rattray again, saw his purpose. The men were casting free the boats.

Of course. They must have the boats. Even assuming they could, by swimming, reach the ice on which he stood—a swim of thirty yards, in heavy clothing and through water a little above freezing-point—not one of them could have climbed the overhanging cliff of the new ice-edge and, before help and ropes could have come from the sledge-parties, many of them would lose such numbed handhold as they might be able to find. To the shelving shingle beach itself was a clear two hundred yards—too far, almost certainly, for them to swim through such cold.

Without the boats some of them—his men—might well drown in the next minute. But . . . wasn't there that floating ice-block, low-lying in the water now, on which they could take refuge till he himself could devise means of getting them ashore? Why was Rattray risking them all in this desperate endeavor to get the boats free?

Then, quite suddenly, Dane knew.

He knew as clearly as if the captain had shouted it across to him—the answer to these questions. Rattray wanted to save the *boats*, as well as the men!

It was easier now, this fight for the boats, for the decks lay nearly level. The little skiff-dinghy was away first, being the lightest and easiest to handle; then the two twenty-eight-foot whalers floated, the crews piling into them as the tackles were freed.

But there was no need to lower them now, for the water had come up to them. The big square-sterned cutter swung away. Then, very quietly, and gentle in her end . . . the *Springbok* settled her decks in the calming sea.

There was a great bubbling from her hatches, a mournful noise, presently stilled; her masts became motionless, lying over at about fifteen degrees, a raffle of gear and crates and débris floating about their feet. She could sink no farther. She was on the bottom. The Antartic would not even do them kindness of hiding what it had done.

“THAT'S that,” said Dane. His voice was completely colorless. He hardly knew he spoke.

They were all mentally stunned; no one had had time, as yet, to take in the full force of the catastrophe itself, let alone to begin imagining its outcome—apart from the half-seen vision that had flashed across Dane's mind at sight of Rattray's struggle with the boats.

“God!” shouted Rattray, pointing from the cutter's stern-sheets with a shaking arm. “Look at it!” he yelled in a hoarse and stuttering incoherence of rage and grief. “Look at the—booby-trap!”

He shook a fist at the sullen gray sky to the south. It was as if he thought some sentient enemy brooded there, watching the undoing of the men who had dared its malice.

At a glance he now read the cause of his ship's death. One could hardly have failed to see it—in the shape and surface of the new ice-edge which overhung the sea. Along that new surface, where the "wharf" had broken off, and running above that in-curving part which had been the roof of the long-hidden sea-hollowing, one could trace, even from the boats, many evidences of the hitherto unseen flaws by which Nature had laid her trap; signs made clear to their reading, now that it was too late.

The "working" of that precariously-held wharf, the alternate tidal rise and fall of the sea which had floated it, the gales and pack pressures of winter and, at the last, the drag of the ship on her hawsers, the moving weight of men and sledges and unloaded cargo, and that final straw of the heavy machinery-case—all had exercised their contrary pull and the rupture came.

The men in all of the four boats were pulling dazedly towards the beach. Dane and Paton and Kildale—with Knibbs alone and wordless in their wake—now made their way along the new ice-edge to join the other where they should land.

The sledging-parties had dropped their drag-ropes and were coming on the run. At the hut the hammering of the carpenters had ceased, and they stood on their improvised scaffolding, staring at the *Springbok's* stilly tilted masts and yards—a funereal sight to see, heart-catching in its utter, irrevocable sadness.

Apart from the captain's one outcry of helpless anger, they were all very silent at first. Then, when sledges and hut-workers and ship's party—some of them hurt—had coalesced there on the shore around their leader, there broke out a commingling of staccato voices—of dumbfounded question and miserable, bewildered answer. It died down very soon: one after another, in groups of two and threes, they turned their faces to John Dane, looked towards the man who had brought them to this, the man who stood for the Expedition, for them all, as a king stands for—and is—his nation.

Isolated here on a frozen land remote as another planet from the world of mankind, these men were in truth a nation—in a sense that neither they nor even any of mankind might have guessed—a new people, born this moment to the earth. And never was the greatest trait of their leader's quietly commanding spirit—his entire unawareness of anything more than the merely natural and obvious in all that he said or did—more surely revealed than now.

"Heads of departments had better see if we're all here," he suggested prosaically.

Without further orders, scientists, officers and men separated into groups. In under a minute it was known that none of the ship's party was missing.

"Thank God for that," he commented with a quiver of feeling in his voice. "Dr. Hay, take as many fellows as you want and look after—but I see you have. Get 'em up to the camp and make 'em as comfortable as you possibly can. I'll be along the moment I can manage it. . . . Mr. Walters," he went on quietly, "get the boats out again and salve all that floating stuff. Not you, Skipper," he added, taking Rattray by the arm. "I'll want you in a minute. . . . Sledge-parties will haul up and unload what they've got and then stand by to take off what the boats bring.

"You might see, while you're over the ship," he added, turning again to the chief officer, "whether there's a chance of freeing any buoyant stuff that may be jammed in the open hatches. They don't look far under water and you might be able to get something out with poles and boathooks. Don't let anybody try to dive, though, for anything. The water's too cold for that—there wouldn't be time for any to drown. They'd get heart-failure first. . . .

"We've been mighty lucky not to lose any one over this, so far," he added in an undertone, with a sorrowful glance at the receding medical party. Four of those who had been aboard the ship, he saw, were being helped or sledged up to the hut-site. He prayed that they might not be badly hurt. His impulse was to follow them at once, and put his mind at rest—but first there were other minds to be reassured.

"We've all got to see to it, now," he went on, "that nothing any one of us does endangers himself or any one else. That's important. We've *all* got to get out of this mess. No reason why we shouldn't—Shackleton's crowd got out of just as bad a fix, down in the Weddell Sea—the *whole* crowd. Right! Carry on!"

They did as he had told them, to, as men will—for as long as there is anything for them to do. It is only after that time is past that the gibberings of fear can hope for any really attentive hearing.

For himself, he watched the four boats push out again to the wreck, saw the sledges resume their work, and then, with quick anxiety hastening his feet, he went up to see the injured.

There were five of them now. Under the chief officer's cross-examination, a rather pale-faced and breathless Pearson had been persuaded to admit that he had "hurt his chest." One of the boats, swinging in the davits as the ship had righted herself, had hit him and knocked him over. Meldrum found two ribs broken.

Of the others, Trembling, the ship's cook, had been badly scalded in the galley by an overturning kettle. Rundle, one of the seamen, had slid across the deck and broken his leg. Wells, another seaman, lay groaning with a lacerated arm and shoulder, laid open by the backlash of one of the broken hawsers, just as he had rushed to try and cast it loose from the bollards. White, the bos'un, had internal injuries, no one yet knew how come by, for in the urgency of their boat-lowering no one had seen it happen; he now lay quietly unconscious. About his case Hay and Meldrum were most concerned of all. They feared an injury to the spine. The others, with ordinary care and treatment, should cause no misgivings.

The five injured men were accommodated in beds hastily made up from among the shore-party's personal kit, sheltered by one of the tents that had been landed at the first. Dane saw that everything possible was being done for them, but he had his own problems to face now. With a cheering word or two he left the hospital-tent and looked around for Rattray.

THE captain was walking disconsolately up and down on the ice, watching the boats at their salvage, unable to take his eyes from his sunken ship. Dane took him again by the arm, offering his tobacco-pouch.

"Come on, light up. You'll feel better for a smoke. . . . Now, let's think this out. We've been in a hole or two before, you and I, and we've always managed to get out of it, putting our heads together on the job. Can't expect the scientific fellows to be much help just at the moment—it's not exactly in their line. . . . Well, here's the position as I see it.

WINCHESTER
TRADE MARK
FLASHLIGHTS and BATTERIES
make light of the dark *bullet-fast*

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"The ship's gone hopelessly, and her wireless with her. I don't think there's much chance of getting any of it out of her either. As for the hut-wireless in that case, and the dynamo and engine with it—well, we *might* manage to haul that up, if we got some of the yards off the ship and made sheerlegs and fished for the lifting-strop with a grapnel—but I'm afraid it wouldn't be any use to us if we did. Here, Knibbs!" he shouted.

The electrical officer was helping with one of the sledges. He looked up at Dane's hail and came over.

"Supposing we saved that case of yours, would the wireless be any use?"

Knibbs shook his head at once. "We'd have to give it a complete overhaul, now the salt water's been at it—and probably replace all the wiring. And we've nothing to do it with. All the rest of my stuff was among the scientific gear—and we hadn't got that ashore when she—"

He waved an expressive hand. It was curious that none of them wanted to refer directly to the loss of their ship.

"Not a hope of wireless I'm afraid, Ou Baas. I've been thinking about it myself. It'll all be corroded to blazes by the seawater, and the insulation ruined everywhere and all the batteries shorted; and we'd want the lighting-set to make the juice for it and the lighting-set'd be in the same mess. And anyhow we've no oil to run it on—except the paraffin we brought ashore for the primus cookers. No, it's hopeless. Not worth worrying about at all."

"H'm. I was afraid so. Now—you got no message away on the ship's wireless, of course, when it—no, of course you couldn't have. You were ashore here."

"Yes; and I'm damn' sorry about that, Ou Baas. If I'd been aboard I *might* just have managed—"

"That's all right. What I want to get at is: what are the chances of any one making a guess at what's happened to us, since we can't tell 'em?"

"They'll guess that *something's* happened," answered Knibbs slowly. "Maybe they wouldn't at once, though. You see, the last message they had was that one of yours yesterday morning, to say we were landing. They'll think we're too busy getting landed now to bother with the wireless for a day or two."

"But after that?" muttered Dane. "They'll never dream *how* we've lost her alongside like this, and both installations together! . . . But anyhow, I think we can count on 'em seeing that something's gone wrong within a few days at most."

"They might just think the wireless had gone wrong somehow," suggested Rattray.

"It isn't likely, from their point of view, that both our sets would go cracking up at the same time," answered Knibbs to that.

"I meant some local atmospheric conditions coming up, or some electric bother in the ether."

"No," was again the reply. "That sort of thing might interrupt communications for a day or two, but not much longer. No; they'll be puzzled. I think you can take it, Ou Baas, that after a week at the outside they'll be pretty certain we've got into bad trouble. No news is *bad* news with us."

"And when the *Springbok* doesn't turn up at Capetown for the winter, that'll confirm it."

"But they won't be able to send down a relief-ship this season anyhow," pointed out the captain. "By the time they've found the right kind of ship for the job—and there aren't too many of *those* knocking about nowadays, and they'd have to provision and man her as well—it'll be far too late to try and get through to us before winter, to say nothing of getting back with us again. We'll have to stop the winter here."

"No reason why they shouldn't be able to send our plane south to look us up, though," said Knibbs. "I know it isn't next financial year till April, but surely in an emergency like this they could pass it through specially, and they could send any sort of a ship as far as the ice-limit, and find a floe to take off from. You don't want much room with a 'giro."

"H'm. Yes. After all, it's getting through the pack that takes the time with a ship. The plane could get here from the ice-limit in less than a day. The ship could be there in a fortnight, taking it easy—any sort of a ship, as you say. I expect that's what they'll do. But of course it'd be too risky for them to try and take us off by plane. Mean too many journeys, and chances of weather interfering at the other end. One trip's about all they'll be able to rely on making with any safety. But at least they'll be able to bring us a wireless, and we'll be in touch again, and our people will know what's happened to us."

"They may even tell us to carry on—give us a new ship for next season," suggested Knibbs.

"No: I'm afraid we can't hope for that. The Expedition's finished. But they'll take us off next season. And in the meantime, we can look out for that plane in about a month's time—or perhaps before. They'll send her all right. It's the obvious thing to do. After all, they know exactly where we are, from the last message we got off. It's our waiting here that may be troublesome, though, till the ship can come next season. From the look of it I'd say we've only got about half the grub ashore—and no coal. Only the temporary paraffin and primuses. And there's the whole crowd to feed and house now—forty men instead of seventeen. . . . Still, as you said, Skipper, there's plenty of other food." He looked up at the penguin rookery.

"And we've got the blubber-stove," added Rattray. "It came ashore with the first lot. That's something."

"It's everything, practically," amended Dane. "The proper hut-stove's still in the ship, and all the coal for it. The only fuel we've got ashore at all is that paraffin. And you can't keep forty men warm all winter with four primus-stoves and about a month's fuel for 'em. . . . The blubber-stove just saves our bacon . . . but I do hope it works better than the last one Sykes tried on us, down in the Ross Sea that year. Eh, Skipper?"

Rattray managed a half-hearted grin. The chief engineer's previous effort had smoked out the whole hut; and they had never got rid of the smuts and the smell. Seal-blubber is an unaccommodating sort of fuel which, if not treated in *exactly* the proper way, will forthwith burst out with a keen, but very elementary, sense of humor. The difficulty was that no one had yet discovered exactly the proper way. . . .

Until they could know more accurately how much of their stores had been landed —and how much the boat-party could succeed in salving from the wreck—there seemed little more to be said.

The three fell silent, watching the work that went on around them. The hut-carpenters had resumed their labors. The sledges, manned by mixed teams of seamen and scientists, were taking their loads to a central dump where, under the general supervision of Ransome, another, party was at work opening the wet and damaged packages and spreading out to dry such as their contents as were worth the trouble. Riley, the shore-party's cook, together with both stewards, had charge of making their inventory of provisions. Already they were all settling down to routine again; already some of the faces of the men were losing their looks of stunned shock and strained alarm which the disaster had occasioned.

IT WAS most fortunate that their original plan of the landing operation had been so carefully arranged beforehand. The "order of importance" decided upon had saved them, now, from many wistfully useless "might-have-beens." They did not find themselves faced by books and magazines and easy chairs when they sought for bread.

First, obviously, had come the sledges for transport-work from ship to hut-site. These had been carried as deck-cargo. Next, the bedding and essential personal belongings of the shore-party, with temporary tents, medical suplies, the blubber-stove, four primus-stoves with cookers of the compact style perfected by Captain Scott, and rations for a week.

These things had been put at the head of the list because it had been decided that the shore-party should land at once; so that, in the event of the discharging being interrupted by bad weather, they would be able to proceed with the shore side of the work—the erection of the hut and depots—even if the ship were compelled to put to sea and stay out for several days.

Next, therefore, the timber and all other necessities for the building of the hut itself had been landed; after which had followed the biggest work of all—the discharging of food and fuel. Only after that had been completed would they have turned their attention to the scientific instruments, books and the amenities and luxuries of civilization which they had brought to make their exile comfortable. Priority had had to go to the boxes upon boxes of pemmican and biscuit, the bags of flour and dried fruit and vegetables, preserved meats and condensed milk and tea and cocoa—and it was during the landing of these that the hitch had come, the gap been filled by Knibbs' electrical plant, and the disaster supervened.

"Now . . . with a relief-ship next spring," resumed Dane, half to himself, "we should be all right. But the hut'll hardly take us all. It was only designed to hold twenty. Of course we can redesign it with bunks, and add the instrument-hut—or the Observatory, as poor old Pater calls it. . . . Precious little observing there'll be now, with all his gear still in the ship. . . . We'll kill a good stock of seals and penguins, put 'em in cold store in that snowbank over there, this side o' the rookery. . . ."

"But we won't have to use any of the other provisions any more than we can help," put in Rattray suddenly.

"Why?"

"Because—the relief-ship may not *get* here next spring. That's why. Suppose next season's like the season they had when the *Discovery* was in these parts? She might never get *near* us! The *Discovery* only once got within twenty miles of the coast at all. . . . Anything may happen down here. *Anything.* I'm not trusting this—Antarctic any more than I'd. . . ."

Dane grinned reassuringly. "Oh, there'll be a relief-ship all right. And they'll know all about the sort of job they'll have to get here. Don't forget the plane. We'll fix up something between us if the ship can't get right here. . . . Anyhow, I'm not going to start worrying till after we've given the old folks at home a chance to qualify for the 'intrepid rescue' headlines—"

Just then Whitehead came up.

"Riley wants to know what to cook for dinner," he said.

"Seal steak and penguin-stew—on the blubber-stove. We'll be living on the country as much as we can from now on, tell him. Pass the word to Sykes to get the contraption going. If it looks like being a slow job, Riley can use the primuses in the meantime and make tea for all hands first. . . . And if you'd like something to take charge of yourself, will you organize a killing-and-butchering party?"

"Aye aye, sir."

The wireless man went, and Knibbs followed him.

Rattray's old face was sternly grave.

"Jack," he asked solemnly, "promise you won't use the other grub any more than can *possibly* be helped . . . till relief's actually in *sight!*"

"Well, you *are* a cautious old ancient mariner!" answered Dane with his little smile.

"I've been taught to be. And I've been caught napping once." He looked miserably again at the *Springbok's* mournful masts.

"But you don't think—"

"I don't think anything, Jack. All I say is that people in a fix, like we are, have got to hang on to what they've got. Stands to reason. Time enough to broach those cases if the seals give out, and we've *got* to. That grub ought to be in reserve—for eventualities. What I say is: you never know."

Dane gave him one long look.

"No, one never does," he said. "But sometimes one can guess. I think I get you, Skipper. And what you say goes. . . . But . . . Lord! . . . you are an optimist, aren't you?"

CHAPTER THREE

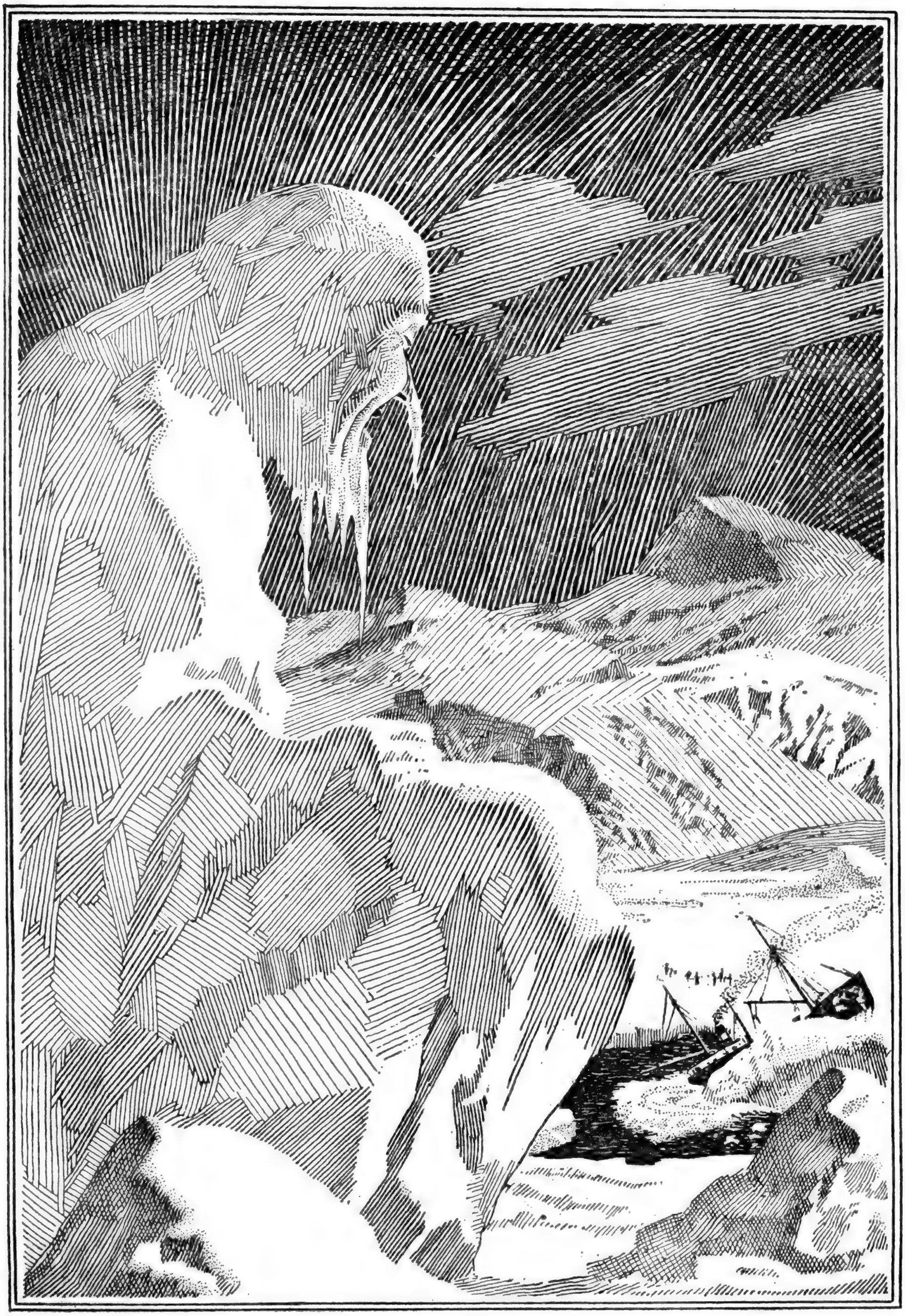
THE COLONISTS

THEIR position was not really as bad as it might have looked—to any one unacquainted with the records of Antarctic exploration. A party of five men under Commander Campbell, detached by Scott for a year's survey of the coast of South Victoria Land, had been unexpectedly marooned for a second winter, far from the comfortable hut in which they had spent their first—and had lived through those months of darkness quite safely (though in hardship and discomfort which might have driven weaker spirits insane) in a cave they had dug for themselves in a snow drift.

They had kept themselves alive almost entirely with seal and penguin-flesh, using the former's blubber for light and heat. They had put by what sledging-rations they had had left in order to maintain themselves through the exacting march they had planned to make the following spring, two hundred miles southwards along the coast to the expedition headquarters in McMurdo Sound. The long winter over at last, they had duly left their hole in the snow and made that march, arriving at Cape Evans without mishap or injury to a single one of them.

Again, for four months, waiting on an inhospitable island in the Weddell Sea, exposed to the buffetings of the most horrible weather in the world, eighteen men had lived under an upturned lifeboat, waiting while their leader and four others, in another boat, sailed eight hundred miles to civilization's nearest outpost to bring back help and rescue.

The *Springboks* were far better off. They had only to wait where they were till relief came; and they would be waiting in a comfortably-designed "hut"—so called more by tradition than fact—with all their shore-party's bedding and personal equipment intact. The provisions they had landed and salved were enough, it was present-



The Westerlies.

ly calculated, for two months' full rations for all—but these they intended to hold largely in reserve. There should be plenty of time, before the penguins migrated for the winter and the seals began to disappear under the freezing ice, to lay in a sufficient larder of fresh meat and blubber-fuel.

Having brought ashore everything he could find floating, or dislodge from the ship's submerged hatches, Walters and his party were now stripping the masts of their yards and sails and running rigging. It might all be useful. The canvas alone would be most valuable for eking out their insufficient bedding. It was heavy stuff, most of it of the stout flax material used largely for bad-weather sails: and though doubtless it would have horrified a suburban housewife, it was to make acceptable and most efficiently warm covering for the *Springboks*.

And it was well that Walters had wasted no time about that work. On the next afternoon, with the foremast and half the yards of the main still untouched, the weather changed and blew up, with steadily increasing force, from the east-north-east. The wreck lay therefore on a dead lee shore; and the seas rose quickly, till they were sweeping steeply in, cold and green, veined with fore-blowing foam and spume, magnificently dreadful, to trip thundering over her submerged hulk and hurl themselves bodily forward as they tripped, churning, enormous, the angry shock of their countless tons of embattled water quivering heavily on the ears.

They would hit the edge of that ancient ice-sheet, there in that angle between glacier and beach, with a clap that seemed to shake even the land; and the backwash of each would leap back, a chaotic turmoil of foaming lather, to meet and be swallowed by the onset of the next. And, above that frenzy, leaned the three masts, half-rifled and forlornly, grimly bare, quivering and jerking with horrible quick spasms as the hull beneath them flinched and cowered under the titan blows of those smiting combers.

Not for long could the bones of that poor carcass resist such awful hammering, such smashing cruelty. The sea has little tenderness for living; and less still for the dead. Soon the mizzenmast began to droop, swaying wildly and yet more wildly with every successive breaker, half-buried therein. It leapt suddenly and was gone, all in a moment. The foremast followed it within the hour; and by the end of that day there remained nothing to mark the *Springbok's* corpse.

And then, slowly, as a mourner leaves the filled and high-piled grave, Captain Rattray turned at last from the sea— to the land, to the living, and the future he dreamed so darkly.

Dane was ready for that moment, had been waiting for it. Despite the hundred things of urgency that he was called on to deal with and decide, he had had an affectionately watchful eye on Rattray from the first. As far as he had been able he had kept the captain's mind and hands at work, taking him out of himself, trying to hold off the mood of black self-blame and misery of depression which, from signs long since learned, he knew was striving now to possess his friend. But the sea's last savagery of destruction had conquered his guard: Rattray had slipped away to watch his ship's utter ending. . . .

"Tea," said Dane, handing him a steaming mug. "Thank the Lord there's no shortage of that —and this is a milk day too. Sundays and Wednesdays are the milk days, and we have sugar on Mondays and Fridays. That's all been worked out already—by friend Pater, Quartermaster-General. . . . Here's Whitey. Don't he look 'orrid?"

The airman was admittedly not a pleasant sight, nor had he been enjoying his work. Both seals and penguins allowed him and his killing-party to approach without suspicion: some of the Adelies, in fact, had been inquisitive, and even defiant—comically, tragically defiant. Only real need can excuse such work—or compel decent men to do it.

"Rotten job," said Whitehead, "But we've enough killed and flensed and butchered for a fortnight, and the blubber-stove's doing fine. The Chief's as pleased as a dog with two tails—and as black as the ace of spades. Smoked something terrific till we got it properly adjusted and learned the hang of the feed. Look at her now, though!"

Their temporary galley had been placed in the lee of a big bowlder near the ice-cliff. A queer squat contraption of sheet-iron and brass piping was vomiting an oily drift of brown smoke from a long black chimney. In general appearance it was rather reminiscent of an ordinary kitchen-stove, with the fireplace between oven and water-boiler, a flat top with cooking-rings, and its chimney rising from the back; but there was the resemblance ended.

In place of oven and boiler were tanks in which the cut blubber was placed, to be melted by the heat of the fire between them. The resulting oil was carried by piping to the "furnace"—where, regulated by a wheel-valve, it was fed into narrow V-shaped troughs like the firebars of an ordinary grate, each filled with small, absorbent "coals" about which Sykes preserved a mysterious silence but which looked like—and may have been—nothing more remarkable than pumicestones.

The fire was started by sliding out the grate and lighting strips of blubber in the "ash-pan" beneath—a messy and very sooty operation. But once it was accomplished and the blubber in the tanks sufficiently melted to supply oil through the pipe, the tending of the stove became a simple matter of regulating the flow. Air came up between the "trough-bars' of the grate just as in a common fire, so that the oil burned much more thoroughly and with much less smoke than in the lighting-pan; and the draught of the chimney drew the flames well under the cooking-rings.

Every one was pleased with the blubber-stove. They had reason to be. Its success would make all the difference during the coming winter.

THE hut itself was now rapidly taking shape. It was a rectangle about forty feet by twenty, with walls ten feet high and a hip-roof sloping in from all four sides to a short, stout ridge in the center—a form which offered the least resistance to the wind. The stove they had decided to put in the middle, dividing the interior roughly into two halves, one for the officers and scientists, and the other for the men. Along three of the four walls they were running bunks, in three tiers, broken by a window in each wall—none too satisfactory an arrangement, but the best that could be done to accommodate so many.

The fourth wall—one of the ends—had the door in it, the rest of it being given over to shelving. Beneath all the lower bunks was enough alloted space for each man's personal belongings. (None of them had very much. The ship's party had little more than the clothes they had been wearing when the disaster had come.) The walls were of wood and malthoid and insulating-quilting to retain heat; with ceiling and floor protected similarly.

Out side the door was to be an elaborate "wind-porch," a kind of enclosed veranda that was practically a small outside room, built along the wall and opening its entrance to the weather at the end farthest from the door of the hut proper. This served the double purpose of acting as an "air-lock" to prevent the wind and cold of the outer atmosphere blowing directly into the hut itself when any one went in or out, and also as a place where a man coming in could get rid of any snow that his clothing might have collected outside. The wind-porch was also found useful, later, as a pantry.

Lighting was a difficulty. They could not go through the long, sunless winter without lights. The electric-plant was in the sea. Blubber-lamps were the only possibility. These would be bound to smoke; and that smoke, condensing in a fine layer of greasy soot over everything, together with the inevitable smoke from the lighting of the stove, would make living-conditions very unpleasant. But there was no avoiding that. It would be better than darkness.

Eventually, after a lot of experiment, it was found that the type of lamp developed by Campbell's party in their snow-hole was the best that could be done. Each lamp gave about the same light as a match, and surprisingly little smoke. One put a "bridge" of pierced tin over an Oxo-cube tin full of melted blubber, with strands of wick threaded through, their ends hanging down into the blubber. Once the fuel had been melted the heat of the lamp itself kept it liquid.

It was a month before all these things were completed, although they were able to move in to the hut from the overcrowded tents within the first fortnight. By that time they had collected a fair supply of fish-food; a supply that they expected to replenish almost daily until the winter should finally close down on them—and even to some extent after that, for the seal does not migrate like the penguin. They needed a big supply to feed forty men; as it was to turn out, they were never able to lay in quite enough to satisfy their hunger—but that was as well.

Paton dared not issue enough biscuits or other carbohydrates to balance the meat-ration; and a sufficiency of unbalanced food is as bad for the health as actually overfeeding. It would have brought rheumatism and other even more serious troubles upon them, with dangerous effects on individual tempers and hence the corporate "morale." As it was, they were kept remarkably fit throughout the winter—though always hungry.

Their "cold-store" was a short twenty yards away, in a cavity of the ice-cliff whose narrow crevice of an entrance Dane had failed to notice when he had at first indicated the more distant snow-bank as the site for their larder. It only needed a little widening of the entrance to make it a thoroughly suitable meat-store. There was ample room for a whole winter's supply.

The heavier of the provision-cases, whose contents would not suffer from exposure and were not to be broached during the winter, had been used to strengthen the outer walls of the hut and to form the walls themselves of the adjoining "wind-porch." The sledges, up-ended, stayed and guyed with some of the spars and rigging salved from the wreck, made excellent additional wind-protection about the outer door.

Once in the completed hut there was not a man but felt some glow of comfort and well-being. Overcrowded they certainly were: even with its improvised additions a place that had only been designed to accommodate half their number was bound to be overcrowded when forty-one men had to eat and sleep and live therein. But every one was remarkably good-humored about that; and the bunk system, once they got used to it, was found less inconvenient than had been expected at the outset.

The absence of the scientific books and gear was also a compensation—though even here there was no telling what ingenious substitutes might presently be brought forth by the eager brains of the bereaved ones, who were already discussing various schemes of improvisation. Professor Kildale, of course, could no wise be prevented from geologizing, for this is a pursuit which requires nothing more than a hammer—of which handy implement they possessed several— and some rocks to break with it, of which the Antarctic Continent offered an ample supply. Fortunately, however, there would be no need for the professor to keep his specimens indoors. . . .

Dr. Hamilton also had ideas. One might make hoop-nets of a sort, he thought, with grommet-strops of wire-rope rigging for the hoop and some more wire-rope, intermeshed for the netting. One could tow them from one of the two whalers in fine weather, and when the sea froze one might keep a water-hole open and then drop them down and haul them up again occasionally. So there was no reason why marine biology should be altogether eclipsed.

But Paton, little Paton, had the greatest cross to bear. For him the ambition of years had gone out almost utterly. Thermometers, barometers, humidity-recorders, anemometers to read off for him the velocities of the winds; his stock of small captive ballons and the apparatus to inflate them, whereby conditions in the upper strata of the atmosphere could be observed and compared: All these were lying down there in the bay, tumbled and smashed in the disintegrating ruin that had been the *Springbok*.

So, too, were also the sodden logs of Ransome's coast-survey. (All *he* had saved was his sextant and theodolite, brought ashore for a preliminary survey of the bay.)

But Ransome had at first found his new land. Paton had become as a man without an anchor: that was why Dane had set him in authority over the storehouse, anchoring him thus again to life and purpose, without which purpose life can have no meaning.

So they had met the Antarctic's challenge, answered the Antarctic's laugh; and they waited now, in a faith made strong by hope and work and comradeship (which is the truest "charity") for the winter towards which the spinning planet carried them, day by shortening day. And Dane saw all that had been done—saw and pondered, examined and re-examined—and prayed that it might stand good.

"But it's a funny thing," he said one day to Rattray, "that no plane has come south to look us up."

THE DAYS drew in and in. The routine of life settled down at Mills Bay. For the Dane Expedition, the hut became a home wherein they had always lived. They were Antarcticans now. The inhabited world was far away, a dream, a fading dream—for still no plane had come. They had given up looking for her.

"I suppose they couldn't get hold of one in time," Dane had summed up. "And it's too late in the season now to risk a flight like that. But we'll see 'em next spring."

They could the more easily bear the disappointment in that they had known all along that the plane could have been of no practical use to them if she had come. They were all right till next season: It was their people at home who would be facing the real suffering of doubt and fear. That was damnable, but it could not be helped; and after all, the greater their anxiety now, the greater their joy would me when they did learn the happy truth. No use railing at the government folk. Doubtless they had done their best to get into touch. . . .

By the movements of the penguins they were warned of winter's coming, as in warmer climes the falling leaves tell autumn's tale. Mid-March, and their molting was over and the new feathers grown.

The rookeries thinned. It was time for their inhabitants to go north again, to escape what was coming here.

The foretaste of that came howling round the hut one dark day near the month's end the first real blizzard. The walls trembled, the anchor-guys sang and the roof was a sounding-board for the song: It seemed that no wind could blow more horribly. Two days and a night it lasted; and when it was past, all the lee side of the hut was a drift of snow.

The next night the sea calmed and froze thinly, in broken sheets, clashing softly one against another, till they had rubbed themselves round, with up-turned edges—pancake-ice, as it is called. All that day it froze, was broken and froze again; and beneath it the swell ran low and sullen, knowing that its defeat was near.

Then, furiously out of the southwest, came another blizzard, and for a week the sea was clear again.

The penguins had all gone now, from everywhere within reach of the hut—for a month, now, they had had to go farther and farther afield for them—and the seals were getting scarce too.

On one night of extraordinary stillness the aurora visited them, red and green and violet, rushing in strange swift silence across the sky.

The moon waxed to its full; the sea froze heavily; another gale blew it clear, and the breakers crashed along the beach with spray that froze as it fell on the shingle.

April ended. The sea lay still and white. May came in with a blizzard that made the memory of their first seem like that of a pleasant sailing-breeze. Half the beach rose in the maddened air; and shingle rattled like shrapnel on the hut-walls, which rocked in the greater gusts so heavily that nothing would stay on the shelves and the men in the bunks dreamed that they were at sea again, in the Springbok. One of the roof-guys twanged apart; and twelve men struggled two hours to replace it before the roof itself should sail away—and when they had it done they came in wounded as from battle.

That blizzard lasted eight wretched days; and in the "lulls" of lesser frenzy they heard the sea, freed yet again from its ice-covering and roaring like a universe gone berserk.

No man went farther in those days than the larder, clinging to a stout rope, waist-high, stretched between; blown backwards from hut to cavity, breathing between the blasts; fighting back again with their loads of frozen food, leaning forward and lugging foot by foot into the solid cataract of air and pebbles; falling incontinently on their faces, the seal-carcasses a-top of them, in those sudden, unpredictable "lulls."

On the ninth morning it was calm again and, within four hours, the sea was frozen stiff. In the afternoon they could walk upon it. But never was that sea-ice quite at rest. Beneath it, twice every day, the tides heaved up and ebbed. The ice-wharf whose treachery had killed their

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ship took to itself an extension that filled half the space between beach and glacier-foot; along its edge was a great crack, a "working" tidecrack, beyond which the sea-ice rose and fell.

On one day of utter calm all the sea began suddenly to groan with a noise as of a great bass-viol; and with that groaning, as they listened ,there came crackings, abrupt and startling, and whisperings, as if imprisoned giants plotted beneath the ice for their liberty. And then a hundred-foot floe would rise with portentous slowness, like a horizontal door, turn on edge, telescope, growling with the titanic shoulder-pressure which lifted it. But if giant here had been under, the ice gave no escape even now. or, as the floe-edge rose, another rushed scooping beneath to take its place, and the gap was sealed.

So writhed the ice under the clear still darkness, Dante-esque in its slow agony, ramming savagery of a pressure that came, perhaps, from hundreds of miles away.

It brought home to the men, as nothing else could have done, the enormous, relentless forces that Nature's powerhouse could produce, pile up and store away in her terrible batteries—batteries that were almost more menacing in their waiting silence than in these roarings of their colossal release—once one had seen that loosing, *and knew.*

MIDWINTER Day, long anticipated and prepared for: the great Antarctic festival!

Paton had been busy a week on the preparations. For one glorious hour, that "evening," all restrictions were forgotten. Penguin and sealflesh, blubber fried in strips, all measured out sparingly from their far-from-ample store: these they had eaten, liven on, borne with for long enough. To-night they would eat *real* food, each as much as he would; drink real wine, each as much as might be, from those jealously-husbanded provision-cases, for once unguarded.

Even Rattray acquiesced in this, joined in heartily, sang afterwards as loudly as any to the accompaniment of Meldrum's imaginary trombone . Stomachs outraged by unexpected plenty made them pay for it during the night and the next day, but even in their pain they agreed that it had been worth it.

It has been hinted that their foraging had produced no more than a bare sufficiency of flesh-food. Killer-whales had been unusually plentiful during the past season, and had taken heavy toll of the seals. Whitehead's parties had had to go farther and farther in search of them, taking sledges to bring back what they got; and sledging is exhausting work under the best of conditions. With unbalanced rations, it was doubly so. Paton was in fact obliged to open up a little on the pemmican and biscuit for these parties—increasing the supply, paradocially enough, so that it might later be husbanded the more by reason of the greater stocks of flesh that the strengthened men might bring in.

But at the best they had only succeeded in storing up two-thirds seal-rations for the winter, and there had come a shortage also of penguins—all the more serious in that their tastier flavor could not be greatly used to "tone up" the monotonous insipidity of the seal-meat. Twice a week, to be sure, Paton seasoned the "hooshes" for them with oxo; but it had to be used very sparingly, being too valuable to waste.

One had to strike a balance between minimums of physical and psychological necessity; and that was not always easy. (So difficult and intricate, indeed, did the problem become that Paton forgot he had ever been a meteorologist— in which, at least, was one man's salvation.) In their frequent talks on the matter Dane had been careful to emphasize the importance of that psychological factor. It was in fact vital. Everything possible had to be done to keep the party in good spirits—and that was an endless fight against the enemies of overcrowding and improvised bedding, the insufficient light of the blubber-lamps and the inevitable grease and soot and pungent smoke of the blubber itself. In that fight, according to established Antarctic custom, the celebration of birthdays and this one great central festival of Midwinter Day had something of the effect of artillery-support in the general's battle-tactics. The food that was "wasted" was like the ammunition similarly "wasted" in putting down a barrage—it kept the enemy out. . . .

Ever since the loss of the sun the whole party had looked forward to Midwinter Day, with an effect on their morale that was incalculable; and now that it was past they would look back on it with something of the same benefit, until the dawn of the greatest day of all—the coming of the relief-ship.

And this heartener was soon to prove very needful. Four days after the midwinter feast they buried White, the bos'un—the petty officer who had been hurt internally. He had never been able to tell them how he had been so injured; he remembered nothing between the first moment of the disaster and his return to consciousness in the temporary hospital-tent.

The other casualties had all recovered by now, and for a time Dr. Hay had hoped to save White also; but the trouble was in the spine, as he had feared. From the first he had been paralyzed from the waist, despite all they could do for him; and they had screened off the bed they had made for him near the stove—and waited for death's inevitable victory.

They buried him in the snow-bank, that immemorial snow-bank; deeply, digging through the crusts of many season's deposits and freezings; but in a day or two they forgot the grave, as the living must. When the weather was calm they went out seal-hunting, along the shore and on the bay-ice, and even played such games as their hunger-weakness would permit, under the gray noon-dusk of the north, or the quietly brilliant stars. And when the blizzards held them weather-bound within the hut, there were great sing-songs, and discussions, and lectures—and some of these last were as absorbing as any book could have been, for among these men was experience enough to make a library of world-wide travel.

But . . . forty men—crammed in a building designed for seventeen, with tasteless food and constant hunger-pains—and the quest on which they had come already frustrated, leaving them no other purpose but that of keeping alive till their friends should come. . . . It was not all football and sing-songs, that winter.

At last, one longed-for noon, the twilight gray in the north glowed red with the light of the hidden sun, glowed and went gray again. The next noon, and the next again, they saw nothing, for the sky was very heavy with cloud.

But the day came when, for one grand minute, the upper limb of the sun himself slid along the horizon of the frozen sea, shining level and unfamiliar into their eyes. They cheered him, watched him dip and go without regret—for tomorrow there would be another sunrise.

And on that day Rattray went out to the boats, beached and up-turned and made safe from the blizzards with great pilings of heavy stones; and stood there for a long time . . . thinking.

Then he sought out Mackworth, the silent carpenter; and between them there began a planning.

The short days grew apace; the sun climbed higher each warming noon, though often it was hidden behind the clouds.

The first of the spring gales tore the sea-ice asunder and sent it grinding out to the floe-packed north, with clashings like cosmic shunting-yards. One night the glacier-tongue of Springbok Point "calved" a berg bigger than a battleship, with a ground-shaking noise of thunder, so that the hut-windows rattled to the shock and men weakened and looked at one another in the dimness of the watchman's blubber-lamp, with eyes that gleamed in startled questioning from the shadows of the bunk-tiers.

In the morning the sea lay open almost to the horizon; and for the first time they began again to look to the north for succor.

But none came. It could hardly be expected so soon.

In the afternoon a wind rose from the nor'nor'west, and with that the ice drifted back to them, its vanguard grounding and sliding up the beach, pushing gravel and bowlders and shore-ice before it with the pressure from the covered sea behind, where now again no hint of water showed. Not even was there a darkening of the sky-horizon to tell of any possible open sea beyond.

"Still," said Dane, "we should be seeing the plane any day."

But Rattray went out again to the boats, where already he had willing—if mystified—helpers. It was something, however, for them to do. They could not realize, as yet, what lay in the captain's mind.

ONE day Whitehead strolled over to watch, stayed to wonder, and asked Macworth, half-humorously, if they were starting a yacht-yard. The carpenter had one of the two whalers turned right side up again, and chocked up on her keel; and he was putting beams across her from gunwhale to strengthened gunwhale. Deck beams, they were, obviously; made of timber and cut-down spars from the *Springbok*, salved or washed ashore after her wreck, or floated to the surface after she had broken up.

"Yacht-yard?" grunted Macworth. "Eh? You *could* say so, Mr. Whitehead." And he went on with his work.

"Could I?" asked the airman mildly. "Why?"

"'Cos the Skipper reckons we'll be goin' yachting' yet, that's why."

"Oh!" It was all the answer Whitehead could summon from his startled brain.

"Yes. So we're deckin' her in. Goin' to deck 'em all in if the ship doesn't come before we're done. Not the dinghy. She's too small. O' course I can't do the planking without taking it off the hut. Skipper says leave that till last. Meanwhile we're doin' the beams. Small cockpit aft—see?—wi' a high coamin' round it to keep out spray an' loose water."

"The men off watch," said Rattray prosaically, coming up behind him, "will live under the decking, where the sea can't get at 'em. And they'll be warmer there anyway. I've an idea for a canvas apron on the cockpit like the Eskimos use up north on their kayaks. Hole in the middle for the man at the helm, and he pulls it taut around him with a draw-string. That makes her as tight as a submarine."

The airman looked at him, groping for words. What was it the captain was hinting at—nay, shouting forth—by these ominous preparations? In another month at the most they would all be aboard the relief-ship!

"We'll carry up a couple o' cowl-ventilators just abaft the mast," Rattray was pursuing, unheeding and almost with enthusiasm, "fitted so's they can be turned any way. And another couple farther aft. We've got to have air. Ther'll be twelve men in each whaler and sixteen in the cutter. Primus stoves'd suffocate themselves—and us—without air. As it is they'll help keep us warm."

Whitehead went on looking at him. The captain spoke as though he were discussing, with a brother amateur sailorman, a few commonplace alterations in some clumsy yacht-conversion picked up for a song from some mud-berth in an Essex creek—for week-end sailing around the Estuary. The airman shuddered involuntarily.

"Be a nasty job of work, if we *do* have to do it," was all he said.

"Nasty or not, Shackleton did it—and so can we, if we have to," maintained Rattray.

"Well, I hope we shan't!" said Whitehead, half laughing and half serious, as he moved away again.

"Who doesn't?" muttered the captain. "But *I'll* think about planes an' relief-ships when I see 'em coming."

"Determined old pessimist!" thought Dane with his slow little grin, watching from the deserted rookery on the hill.

The penguins would soon be returning now. Spring was in the air. For those who waited, heavily bearded, their faces blackened with ingrained blubber-soot, ruffianly in their much-mended, fast-failing clothing, the spring should soon bring more than penguins. Release was near, came nearer every day.

Sickened and weary with a great stomach-weariness of the unending flesh-diet, they had long since begun to look covetously on the almost untouched provisions-cases; but Dane had so far kept the word he had given to his foreboding friend, and Paton backed him loyally. Sometimes there were murmurings, but they never came to more. It was the same for every one. If John Dane could stick it and thought it needful to stick it, then there was nothing to be said. It *seemed* silly, though.

But as the days passed and lengthened, and there came neither ship to rescue them nor plane to gladden them with the promise of rescue—it began to seem less silly. . . .

"I feel it in my bones they *won't* come," said Rattray to Dane, "perhaps *can't* come."

"Oh, nonsense," said Dane, cheeringly. "At least you will say nothing to the men about your forebodings."

"Except in so far as they see me pushing on with the work."

"Call it precaution," pleaded Dane.

A FEW days later, Dane and Ransome were standing on the "lookout," the summit of Penguin Hill, as they had come to call the rookery. All around them the birds carried on busily with their domestic affairs, with a casual indifference that even Whitehead's needfully frequent butchering-parties had failed so far to pierce.

"What on earth can have hung them up like this?" asked Ransome. He was chewing nervously at the stem of a pipe that had long been empty. (The tobacco had given out months ago, and they had found no satisfying substitute.)

That's just what I can't even begin to make out," answered Dane soberly. "They know exactly where we are—the last message we got off was all about our landing, and I gave 'em the latitude and longitude and everything. They must have known practically at once that something had gone wrong. Unless the relief-ship's got into trouble herself, in the pack . . . but then, she'd be coming straight down to us from Capetown, and they'd be sure to have a plane, and a plane could reach us easily from the northern limit of the pack. First thing they'd try to do would be to fly over and see if we were all right. I can't understand it at all."

Down at the boats—like one possessed—Rattray and his men were hard at it: they had already taken much of the hut's outer layer of planking for their decks. Three weeks ago Dane had given his assent to that; then he had pretended to be amused; now he was amused no longer.

"Carry on, Skipper," he had said, jokingly. "When the ship does come we can hoist the boats aboard and take 'em home with us. The first yachts ever built in the Antarctic ought to fetch something!"

"The ship won't come," Rattray had insisted, stubbornly, "and we can't stay here for ever. I've got it into my head there's something wrong over *there,*" and his eyes glared away to the northwest. "Otherwise a plane would have been here before the winter set in."

"If no ship comes we'll have to try the boats," Dane had had to admit. "But of course she'll come."

"We shan't want the hut next winter either way—so there's no harm in my having some of the outer planking now," the captain had concluded doggedly—and to that unassailable logic there had been no answer.

"What's—zero hour?" asked Ransome now. "Have you decided yet, Ou Baas?"

Dane did not reply at once.

It was a morning like that on which they had first approached this implacable land, cloaking the latent menace of the place in still sunshine and glorious colorings. Dane was staring out over the sea—the open sea. Hardly a speck of ice was to be seen in all its blue calm. The sun made a track of bright silver across it. He had thought, for an instant, to have caught from the tail of his eye a glimpse of something tiny and dark on the skyline—a thing that had been happening to him rather often of late. And, as usual, when he looked directly towards it, the speck was gone.

"We can't leave it too late, unless we want to get caught by winter again," prompted Ransome in a voice of unwilling realization.

"I know. That's the devil of it. But you see, the moment we clear out of here in the boats it means we're chucking away our chance of being found. Assuming the ship's been delayed in the ice. . . ."

"But her plane ought to have shown up—"

"I know. That's the devil of it. They ought to have sent a plane before winter. If they did, and couldn't reach us—I don't see *why* they couldn't; there was plenty of good weather—they ought to have tried again, after the winter. I can't see how they could go on failing. We *ought* to have had them here, long ago. I do *not* understand. I *can't* believe. . . . I wonder what can have given Rattray that queer premonition?"

"They *must* know!" put in Ransome. "*Therefore,* why has no plane come? . . . I hate to say it, but it does look as if. . . ."

"I know it does. But I *can't* believe it. They *can't* have just ignored us—left us to shift for ourselves."

"Unless there *is* some wireless interference, and they've put our silence down to that—but no, when the *Springbok* didn't turn up at Capetown they'd *know* something was wrong. . . ."

"They *must* have sent a ship. Our problem is, will she get here this season, or won't she? Because if she doesn't, then we've got to shift for ourselves, and the sooner the better. I don't see how we're going to stand another winter here, on our rations. You can't go on forever on the wrong food. . . . But if we're going to get out this season by ourselves we'll have to start practically at once. That's the point. As you said, if we leave it too long, and no ship *does* come, then we're stuck for another winter.

"It would never do to get caught by winter on our way. . . . It comes to this—if we wait, it means we're banking on a ship being able to get through to us this season. And it's just as likely as not that she won't. In which case the chances are that a lot of us would never get through the winter here. . . . But suppose we go, and a ship does get here—after we've gone? Where's she going to look for us? Of course we could leave a note behind, giving our plans—but could we carry 'em out? *You* know how erratically the pack drifts—and half the time we'd have to drift with it. Roughly northeast, it usually is, but you can never quite count on it."

"But if they've got a plane, with its enormous radius, they'd soon—"

"We've got to take it they haven't got a plane. Or we'd have seen it long ago. No; once we start in the boats, it will almost certainly be up to us to carry right on to the end. And I don't think you quite understand what it would be like. *I* didn't, till I started thinking seriously about it. Listen! We're in 71° 21′ South latitude here. There are thirty-eight degrees between us and the Cape. That's nearly two thousand three hundred miles. Over three hundred of 'em between us and the Antarctic Circle—and in this longitude you'll find ice as far north as 45° South. That's fifteen hundred miles away."

"BUT it wouldn't be *pack-ice* all that way," said Ransome.

"No. That's the one comfort. I don't suppose the limit of actual *pack* is very much north of the Circle. Three hundred miles away, you'll remember. And it probably starts just over the horizon from here. Three hundred miles of pack—if we went due north. How fast d'you suppose we'd be able to move in it? Shackleton tried it—after the *Endurance* was crushed in the pressure.

"They put sledges under their boats and tried to haul 'em over the ice. But the surface was too awful. Pressure-ridges that they had to dig through, slush and melting snow covering the floes—and you know what *that* means for sledges. Imagine what it meant with heavy boats on 'em, and the men falling through up to their waists as they dragged at 'em! They managed two miles a day for three days and then cracked up. It simply couldn't be done. He had to give up and wait for the drift to take 'em north. But *he* started in October, with the whole summer ahead of him, and plenty of grub from the ship. It was April before the drift brought him to open water. We're in November already, hanging about waiting to be relieved—and we've only grub for about six weeks. Of course we'd be able to hunt seals while we drifted, same as he did—but if we started now and it took us the same time to get north with the pack. . . ."

"But it mightn't be as bad as that, Ou Baas," objected Ransome. "When we came south last year the pack wasn't *too* bad."

"No—not too bad for the poor old *Springbok*—wtih her steel ram and her engines and all those sails to force a way through between the floes! But in our boats? We couldn't budge the average floe an inch—you know it's only possible to make room to get through by pushing 'em aside bit by bit each side of you as far as your power can move 'em, using the sum of a whole lot of little leads to make one lane to sail in. . . . No, when the pack *did* loosen up at all, we'd find just what Shackleton found—it'd be too loose to drag the boats over it and not loose enough to launch 'em. . . . If we started *now* I reckon we wouldn't reach open water till April at the earliest.

"We might make the grub last, with seals to help—but could we last ourselves? What sort of shape would we be in at the end of that time? With winter coming on! Shackleton had islands to go and camp on right away, with South Georgia eight hundred miles distant. *We'd* still be two thousand from the Cape—with a course slap *across* the Westerlies, which we couldn't do anyhow. Not in the boats."

"But if we *had* to?"

"You know how it blows in the Forties. You know the sort of sea that runs all the time! Reef down to safe canvas—and with the east-going surface-current helping the wind and the scend of the seas you'd make more easterly leeway than headway to the nor'ard! You'd be sailing sideways to Australia, that's what you'd be doing! And we couldn't last to Australia if we *steered* for it! But if you set enough canvas for enough speed to overcome your leeway, you'd just blow right over. . . . No; once we were clear of the pack we'd have to run *before* the wind—which is *always* from the westerly quarter. Run to the east'ard. Well, the only land to the east'ard that we'd have a hope of reaching would be the Crozets, or Kerguelen. . . . Both uninhabited. . . . It's all nonsense, anyhow. Relief's *bound* to come in a few days now. . . .

"Still, there *is* just one chance in a hundred against it—there's no such thing as an *absolute* certainty in these parts. The ship *may* have got disabled. There *may* be no chance of reaching us this season. And I don't think we could stand another winter here, under these conditions. So now we're talking about it we may as well get hold of the Skipper and see what he says. He'll probably back up the 'self-help' idea, the ruddy old croaker," he went on almost cheerfully, as they descended the hill. "I believe he'd be very nearly glad if they didn't relieve us. He'd be able to say, 'I told you so'—or at least, he'd be able to think it. He never *says* it. Oh, no!" Dane chuckled.

Ransome could not respond to that lighter vein. Even though he himself had broached the question, it seemed unreal and horrible, a thing to ponder on with awe and shrinking.

As they passed on their way to the "Yacht-yard," he saw that some of the men were washing clothes outside the hut. Already there were lines of more or less tattered garments hung out to dry in the sun. He dwelt lingeringly on this almost comfortably domestic scene. The soot-blackened roof and smoking chimney of the hut were very homely now to his sight. It seemed that he had lived here always. And now they were talking of leaving it—of casting themselves a-drift, in three little boats, on the mercy of one of the worst seas in the world!

For a week or more they had all been facing that decision, but only as a possibility, an unlikely possibility, a conceivable "last resort"—in case the ship did not come.

But, *of course*, the ship would come to-morrow!

It seemed now to Ransome that, despite the way he spoke, Dane was beginning to give up that hope, to consider the boats as a serious alternative. . . .

When one really faced it, the thing looked uglier every minute.

But the Skipper was undaunted in his firm resolve.

"We're a good deal north of where Shackleton was," he said at once. "The pack he had to deal with was all jammed up in the Weddell Sea. Here we're facing *open* pack, without any land to cram it in on itself, so ten to one conditions'll be be much freer for us than *he* found 'em. Even if we waited another fortnight, we'd still be starting at the best time. There's been enough summer already to thaw out the pack a bit and open it up for us, and—"

"In that case we could only move ahead when it was loose enough for sailing," interrupted Dane. "It'd be too loose and rotten for dragging the boats *over* it."

"Then we'd wait for the drift to take us north. We'd camp on a floe, like Shackleton did, and hunt seals. After all, as far as grub goes, we wouldn't be any better off if we stayed here. . . . We'll *have* to try."

"But if they came here and found us gone," reiterated Ransome.

That remark aroused Rattray to anger.

"We've got to face facts, not 'ifs'," he barked. "I don't believe they're coming at all. I don't believe they *can* come, or we'd have seen a plane flapping over us *months* ago."

There was an awkward, pregnant pause. Then, slowly, Dane shook his head. His eyes were troubled.

"Come back to this scheme of yours, Skipper," he said. "If we started *now*—"

"We'd be through the pack, I reckon, in three months at the most. I tell you, Shackleton was all jammed in the Weddell—"

"All right, all right, Skipper. I heard you the first time. Take it we're through in three months? What sort of condition would we be in for going on?"

"If we stay here till next season, what sort of condition will be in for *starting?*" countered Rattray. "We'd never get through another winter here. You know that!"

"Well, suppose we do start, now, get through the pack, and can still manage to face a boat-voyage in the Westerlies. Where do we make for?"

"Crozets or Kerguelen. Crozets are nearer, but Kerguelen's a bigger target."

"But they're all uninhabited!" put in Ransome.

"Yes, I know—but there's a provision-depot on Kerguelen, in Hillsborough Bay. Another two on the Crozets—Hog Island and Possession Island. For castaways."

"You sure they're still there?"

"Well, I had the job of overhauling 'em myself, three wears ago. In any case, whether they're there or not, Kerguelen or the Crozets are the only places we *can* make for. We've got to run before those Westerlies, and the only other land is Australia. But we'd never make Australia direct; grub and water wouldn't last. . . . We must go through the pack as straight north as we can, and then run for it as soon as we make open water. Of course we'd never be quite clear o' the ice at all. You'll find bergs and drift-ice as far north as Kerguelen itself.

"Now suppose we had about a thousand miles of sailing to do. Shackleton did eight hundred from Elephant Island—where he'd left his men—to South Georgia, and he did it in a fortnight. Our boats'll be better fixed than his was, and able to carry more sail. His *James Caird* was only canvas-decked, you know. Say we took three weeks. We'd—"

"But here's the point that cooks the whole damned show!" burst in Dane. *"What if we missed the Crozets, and went on and missed Kerguelen as well?* As you said yourself, there's only Australia beyond 'em—and we'd never make Australia."

Ransome caught his breath. The almost dispassionate way in which the other two had carried on the discussion had begun to make the idea of the boat-journey more real to him—and decidedly more possible than it had appeared at first. He actually found himself hoping that Rattray would be able to convince his chief, that Dane might after all decide to end this awful tension of idle and seemingly endless waiting.

THE primitive instinct to get up and *do* something is strong enough in all of us. It had been tempting Ransome fiercely. He could not read it in the leader's impassive face, but it was tempting Dane far more sorely. Both were almost certain by now that no help was coming.

In God's name, then, let them help themselves! Why talk of disaster? They were expert navigators, weren't they? Why should they miss those islands? Navigators could always find their own way. Why, he knew a good deal of navigation himself! One just—

A cold deadliness of fear squeezed his heart. He *saw* now what Dane had meant a moment ago. They could not navigate without nautical equipment. Where were their charts, their books of tables, their Nautical Almanac? At the bottom of Mills Bay. . . .

But even in that moment of despair there remained in Ransome, unreasoning but undefeated, the faith that all men have in a leader. He looked to his. Surely John Dane. . . .

But Dane was watching Rattray, his trusted friend, with a look of still compassion in his steady eyes. The captain was kicking the gravel of the beach, his face downcast and averted. Dane knew the ogre that was riding his soul, knew that it had long been gnawing into his mind.

The time had come to face it!

"We've still got my sextant, Ou Baas," faltered Ransome, dry-throated. "Could you—can you do anything with that?"

"Aye. We've got the sextant," muttered Rattray colorlessly.

"But no tables," added Dane. "We couldn't even get a meridian observation for latitude. You want the Nautical Almanac for that. Must know where the *sun* is."

"Wait a minute. . . . Midsummer Day! The sun's farthest south on Midsummer Day—twenty-three thirty South. Tropic of Capricorn. I remember *that.* Couldn't we—"

"Well, suppose we *got* our latitude, on Midsummer Day. We'd still be in the pack. We might get it again on the autumn equinox, when we know the sun's on the equator. That might help us to know *where* we were, assuming we could *see* the sun at noon on those days—a big enough chance to take, by itself—but would our latitude be much use, after all? *We don't know the latitudes of the places we're trying to get to. I* can't remember 'em near enough. One degree error equals sixty whole miles, don't forget. With average visibility we might be able to see five or six miles from the boats. We could easily go right past—within seven miles of safety! . . . The point is, we'll only be able to find out where we are on one day—the equinox—and then only with a lot of luck to help us."

"Assuming we got our autumn equinox latitude?" asked Ransome, anxiously.

"We'd still be uncertain of our *longitude,"* said Dane. "We could only get it very roughly, from the difference in suntime from what it is here, by our watches. So even supposing we knew the position of the islands, we still couldn't set an accurate course for them, even if we could steer it when we'd set it! The only chance would be if our autumn equinox latitude happened by a pure fluke to be the *same* as that of the islands."

"Then we could steer due east," said Ransome, "until we hit 'em?"

Dane smiled.

"But how are we to steer due east? We've only got magnetic compasses in the boats, and who's going to tell us what the variation is as we go along? We've lost *all* our charts and books."

Rattray's face was still averted.

"*I* thought of all this," he began, in a firm but muffled voice. (It was coming at last, thought Dane.) "Thought of it—as we came ashore—in the boats—when the ship went down. Thought of it, you see—about . . . twenty minutes . . . too . . . late."

And still he did not look at Dane.

"You thought of it—the day you saved the boats?" echoed Ransome. "D'you mean to say that even *then* you were working out what to do—if no ship came?"

And now Rattray looked up, and turned his convulsive face to his leader and friend.

"Yes—and I let you down. Let every one down. Me! I ought to have *thought* of those charts and tables. I was *standing* on the side of the charthouse, too. . . . As near as *that!"*

Miserably he began to turn away. Dane put a rough hand on his arm.

"Pipe down!" he ordered. "It's too late now to cry over spilt milk. . . ." (Dane's voice lifted bravely.) "I'm surprised at you, Rats! A man of your incredible foresight, too! Damned carelessness! Sheer neglect and want of thought. You had two whole minutes to do things in. Two whole minutes! And the only damn' thing you did in all that time (he now spoke with deliberate emphasis) was to launch four boats, and save every man jack of the ship's company! Why the hell didn't you nip down into the forehold while you were at it and grab the hutstove and a few odd tons of coal?

"Look what this damned blubber-smoke's done to us all! 'Longside us a chimney-sweep'd look like a saint in a stained-glass window! And *you* could have fetched ashore a few books and magazines for us to read—there'd have been plenty of room in the other pocket! Two whole blasted minutes, Rats! And all you thought of was the boats, and getting the men ashore safe! . . . Why, you cursed old Viking, *you*—who the devil else would 'a' thought of anything at all? . . . Come on—*chuck* it! We're a tough lot, we are, and we're going to take an almighty lot of killing. . . ."

Dane's words were electrical.

"Now then, Skipper, back to the job again. If you thought of all *that* so long ago, then you must have thought of a lot more, some way round, eh?"

"Well, there's one thing," Rattray replied, calmly resolute. "I happen to remember the position of the Possession Island food-depot. It's forty-six twenty-three South and fifty-one forty-six East. I told you I had the job of overhauling it. And I think we might get some sort of a position on March 21st—though we can't correct the observation for refraction and so on without tables. As for the steering—well, the magnetic variation isn't a cheerful sort of thing to try and guess—"

"IT'S seventeen West here," began Dane slowly, with a puckered brow, "and—what is it at the Crozets, Skipper—d'you remember that too?"

Rattray considered. "About forty West," he answered at last.

"A hell of a difference," Dane commented.

"I *did* think of a rough way around it," said Rattray.

"I knew it," laughed Dane, turning to Ransome. "He thinks of everything."

"When the sun gets to its highest point in the sky on any day," continued Rattray, "we can watch for the difference by observing its altitude with the sextant, and waiting till it stops rising—well, that's noon, isn't it?"

He seemed to wait for an answer to such an obvious question.

"And the sun's due north at noon, isn't it? Head the boat straight for the sun, then, near as we can, and see what the compass says. The difference'll be the compass-error—and we can get it every day the sun shines at noon. . . . It's going to be a guesswork job at the best, but that's better than nothing."

"It'll be a hell of a chance," mused Dane. "A *hell* of a chance. Apart from all these errors and things. 'Bout one in twenty, I'd say, of getting through. . . . Don't want to pile it on. Say one in ten. But with all this navigation guesswork added—well! Fifty to one'd be near enough. Ye-es," he went on, as though the calculation were of some importance. "*About* fifty to one. . . . Why, we

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shouldn't even know how fast we were going, how far we'd *got!*"

"I've made an old-type log," said Rattray doggedly. "Walters and I fixed it the day we took one of the whalers out last season—to try Hamilton's hoop-nets."

"Good man—that's something, anyway!" said Dane, and paused for a long time, thinking deeply.

As he had said, to put out in the boats would be taking frightful chances. They could not afford to miss those islands. There was only Australia beyond—another three thousand miles. No man could last that time in these boats. The food would be ended long before. Their water-supply, eked out even to the utmost from floating ice on the way, would not last beyond Kerguelen. From there onward they would meet with ice no more. If they missed the scattered Crozet Islands, and then missed Kerguelen as well, they were simply done for.

He balanced the chances of surviving that voyage against the chances of surviving here until relief should come. The problem boiled itself down to that. First, then, if they stayed, there was the chance—a chance he did not like to look at at all, but which was forcing itself upon him with steadily increasing insistence—*the chance that no relief might come at all.* In that event they were doomed if they stayed. Utterly. But hang it all, this was a government expedition! They could not be—forgotten. *But*—no plane had come. And a plane *should* have come. His mind slid away from the thing. He could not bear to ponder on it. He felt he would go mad if he did. *What* were they doing in South Africa? If he could only *know*. . .

Enough! What were the chances, if they stayed, of a relief-ship arriving in time to save them? What were the odds against her getting here this season? Heavy. They themselves had been fortunate in getting through in one season. This part of the Antarctic had had an abominable reputation for centuries.

If they decided to winter here again, there remained, as Rattray reminded them, the possibility, nagging at their minds, that they would in the end have to save themselves just the same. He could say definitely that they could not stand it. Could they go on living on such food and fuel as were obtainable? Could they survive the gloom and disappointment and idle, miserable hardship and growing despair of another winter? No.

His men were the very best that the race had ever bred—he knew that; and they had proved themselves fit for the utmost trust: but even they had their breaking-point. They were only human. He himself was only human. And the mental, psychological, *spiritual* side depended so much on the physical. Each interacted with the other. Mental sickness—even ordinary worry—could, if long-continued, seriously derange the body.

And the body would drag down the mind. Food. Man was so very much an animal after all. Give him food insufficient or unsuitable—and theirs had been both—or even too ample, and what happened? What happened, in the end, to Man's vaunted superior intelligence, his "divine spark?" The spark died down, slowly, fighting to the end, but its end was inevitable.

If they had to winter here again—then, in addition, the unthinkable would become *fact*—however unbearable that fact might be. *If they were not relieved this season, then they would have to face the fact that they were not going to be relieved at all.* They *should* have been relieved by now. If there had been any hitch, then a plane would have been sent. . . . No; he must not go over all that again. He had got to decide *now.*

"I'll give 'em a bit longer to come and get us," he pronounced at last. "If they don't come, then off we go. We can't risk another winter here. We'd start going mad. It's the sixth of November now. . . . The last date we dare risk with any hope of getting clear before winter is . . . well, we'll say the end of the month. Not a day longer. . . . We'll give 'em till then. If they don't come it's up to us. . . . But they'll be here before then—the ship or a plane. *Surely.* There must be *some* explanation. . . . I can't see any myself, but it'll all be clear enough when they tell us. . . ."

"Yes," said Rattray, stolidly. "In the meantime, Chips and I'll be getting on with these boats."

CHAPTER FOUR

EXODUS

THE First of December dawned dull and chill, with a bitter plateau-wind from the south-southeast. From the lookout on Penguin Hill there were not half a dozen specks of ice to be seen on all the swept gray sea.

The day was depressing enough in itself without the added depression of the stern fact, known now to every man, that its coming marked the end of their last hopes of help. From now on they must depend on themselves alone. No ship had come, no plane had appeared to bring them any message of cheer. The "unthinkable" had happened. Somehow the world had failed them after all!

The boats had been brought down from the "yacht-yard" the previous day. Now, ready-laden, they lay afloat alongside a stranded floe that projected like a jetty beyond the surf-line. The men stood about on the ice-cluttered beach, waiting only for the final word from their leader. The dismantled hut lay behind them, and they dared not turn to look at it. They did not even turn when they heard the lonely footsteps of Dane himself, returning from the lookout. They knew there was nothing in sight.

Before he had climbed the hill they had known that there would be nothing. Hope, daily disappointed and deferred for so long, had really been dead a month.

As Dane reached the beach, Rattray and Walters and Pearson grouped themselves about him for a brief final conference. There was no expression whatever in his face. He stood very erect under his awful load of responsibility—but within him his soul was bowed almost to its breaking. He had neither slept nor tried to sleep in the "night" that was past. He had spent most of it up there on the hill, the low sun behind him, searching the northern horizon . . . searching!

"We've a fair wind, anyway," he said now. "Don't forget—the most important thing is to keep together. We mustn't get separated. The cutter may be a shade faster than the whalers with the wind on the quarter. If so I'll reef or trim as necessary, to keep with you. The general idea is to keep going as fast as possible and as long as possible. If we can do that without too much risk of piling up or getting separated, we'll go on day and night as long as we've enough water to sail in. In that case each boat's-crew must look after its own feeding. And we'll all have to take special care that the stoves don't set light to anything."

That warning was important. The blubber-stove from the hut had been fitted amidships in the cutter, as she was the largest of the boats and best able to take its weight. Sykes and his engineers had been busy for some weeks improvising two smaller stoves for the whalers, from biscuit-tin material. These were little more than fire-trays, to be filled with porous seal-bones to soak up and burn the melted oil from the strips of blubber with which the trays were fed. Cookers were put on a stand over them. They could obviously only be used on the ice or in fairly calm weather. If upset by the boat's motion in a seaway they would pour their blazing oil out on to the bottom-boards. The idea of them was to economize as much as possible on the paraffin for the primus-stoves (of which fuel they only had a little) until their supply of blubber should run out. As long as the first and longest part of their journey lasted—their progress through or with the pack—they expected to keep up their stock of seals, and would also be able to rely, as a rule, on calm enough conditions for the blubber-stoves.

Once through the pack, however, they would be sailing, for three weeks or more, within the belt of globe-girdling Westerlies and its tremendous, perennial sea—in which no blubber-stove could be used. They had to save their paraffin for that. Cramped as they would be in these boats, day and night, under the frigid conditions of a subantarctic sea, their endurance—and their will to endure—could never be maintained without hot meals. The essential heat of their bodies had to be reënforced. Without that, the most dauntless of spirits must soon be defeated.

"Well, we may as well push off," said Dane prosaically. "Cutter's crew on board!"

He stepped forward himself, and was joined by Captain Rattray, Mr. Sykes and Murray (one of the engine-room assistants, Paton, Tarrant, Ridgway and Wootton (meteorologists), Mackworth the carpenter, Dr. Hay, Trembling and Morris (the *Springbok's* old cook and steward respectively), and four seamen—Rundle, Williams, Jackson and Marks.

Mr. Walters, one-time chief officer of the *Springbok,* had with him in the first whaler Whitehead the airman, Drs. Meldrum and Hamilton, Professor Kildale, Riley the shore-party's cook, Jeans the sailmaker and five men—Loftus, Simms, Ray, Matthews and Jones.

Pearson had charge of the other whaler, with Mills the third officer, Ransome, Knibbs and Tyson (second engineer), Bartlett and Streator the other two engine-room assistants, Harmer the shore-party steward and four men—Holliday, Douglas, Jacks and Wells.

It took time to settle them all in their places. The stores had been loaded in each boat with all possible compactness, but it had also been necessary to have most of them accessible; so there was not much room under the decks for the men. To enlarge that space as much as possible Rattray had removed the pulling-thwarts—except the after one, designed to carry the stroke-oarsman. This now crossed the fore end of the cockpit. The deck-beams took over the duty of the other thwarts as transverse strengthening; and he had had to allow, from the first, for the fact that the decking would make rowing all but impossible in any case.

Even handling the sails was going to be awkward on that account, despite the taut life-lines which had been stretched, waist-high, on stanchions along each side. But these drawbacks of decking had to be accepted; for it was a vital necessity to have it. Apart from giving the men shelter and some warmth, it would be bound to break aboard in the weather they would have to face. Nothing can wear out men's spirits more quickly than the constant labor of bailing, and the wretchedness of constant exposure to ice-cold water. Their decks would greatly reduce these miseries. They might even save them from being utterly swamped by some big breaking sea—a disaster that otherwise would end them in one blow.

IN ADDITION to the cased provisions and the men's own bedding, there were cleaned seal-carcasses, rolls of blubber wrapped in their skins, penguins and great lumps of fresh ice to eke out the water-breakers—all to be stowed in a space below decks that had also to hold the whole crew—except for the one helmsman in the cockpit.

At last they were all settled in on board.

Dane took his place at the cutter's tiller and gave the order to shove off. The boat began to drift out into the wind. The confining brails of the loose-footed mains'l were let go; and first away, she squared off before it, to the cheers of the whalers' crews.

A minute later the boomed mizzen was also set; but with the wind so far aft the small additional assistance it gave was offset by the drag of the strong weather-helm it caused, so Dane had it lowered again. Running as they were it was best to keep the sail-power well for'ard, and let it pull her along.

When she was settled on her course Rattray got out the "log" he had improvised. It was a lump of wood, shaped to offer the greatest possible resistance to being dragged through the water, with a length of line attached, knotted at carefully measured intervals. He threw the wood over the side and counted the knots on the rope as it was dragged out, while Dane kept his eye on the second-hand of his watch. Half a minute was the time-factor in the sum.

The fifth knot had just been pulled overside when he called "Stop!"; so five knots was her speed.

"Not too bad," was Rattray's comment. "If we could only average that right through, day and night, we'd be there in ten days!"

By now both whalers were under way also, their curved bows piling up the spray in a way that was inspiring to watch.

Dane carefully observed their relative progress and found that on this "point of sailing" there was little difference between any of the boats. There was no need to take off any more of his own sail to allow the others to keep up. Striking the mizzen had been enough.

The glacier ice-tongue slipped by to port and was passed astern; they were in the open ocean now, with Mills Bay and all that it had meant to them behind at last. The phase of helpless waiting had ended; they were doing something for themselves now. And however heavy the odds might be against them, there was hardly one of them who did not feel the better for it.

So, with hearts encouraged by the favoring wind, bitter cold though it was, the little flotilla stood out and on—into one of the world's most terrible seas.

Rattray had "hove the log" just after ten a.m. At first it was plain sailing, with the wind freshening a little and sending them along finely. About noon the sky cleared somewhat and gave them the added good cheer of the sun. The wind being off the land, there was only a moderate sea, overrunning a long low swell from the northwest. The former they hardly felt, for it came up from almost dead astern and only overtook them slowly; the latter they had on the beam, but its tendency to set up a roll was counteracted to some extent by the steadying pressure of the sail.

They were able in all three boats to make tea on the blubber-stoves, serving it out about twelve-thirty, with a biscuit to each man.

The first meal of the voyage—and very heartening!

From the broken ice-débris in the lee of a table-topped berg they replaced the ice they had used for that tea. As long as they could find such ice there would be no water-shortage, for all bergs are but calvings from glaciers of the land and are therefore of fresh-water ice. Even floe-ice, after some time, will often be found to have lost much of its salt.

There would be no need to provide fresh water for their evening "hoosh"; this consisted of a stew of seal and penguin-meat and blubber cut into small "dice" with a very sparing thickening of pemmican—a concoction in which they had used sea-water from the beginning, in order to save their small supply of salt.

So far all was very well. Crowded as they were below decks, they had "shaken-down" after some fashion of their own, and were at least warm and dry.

But in the early afternoon the ice began to thicken in their path; the floes, at first small and easily dodged, became larger and heavier; and the "ice-blink" paling of the sky ahead told unmistakably of the true pack itself.

Rattray had the afternoon watch at the cutter's tiller. Dane had settled himself for a rest in his "cabin"—a bunk-space under the deck on the starboard side of the steering-cockpit, opening into the cockpit itself through a leather-hinged plank-flap "hatch." There was another one to port. Dane and Rattray and Tarrant—a Cape yachtsman who had done a good deal of sailing in Table Bay and its environs—were to steer by turns in three watches; and as they would always be one of them on duty, there was need only for two bunks between them.

The arrangement had the added advantage that the relieved watchkeeper, tired and cold and wet as he would almost inevitably be, could turn-in to blankets which had just been left by his relief, and which would therefore be warm already. (It would be too much to hope, after even a short time in these boats, that any of their bedding would be dry.)

"Pack-sky ahead, Ou Baas!" said Rattray, rapping on the flap "door" of Dane's compartment.

"Well, the sooner we meet it the sooner we'll be through it," was the muffled answer. "Call me in any trouble—and in any case at six."

The boats sailed on.

An ominous cloudbank rose and spread up from the west; the wind shifted with it and freshened in a series of gusty squalls, with blinding flurries of snow.

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Rattray cursed under his breath as he gybed over the mains'l, then pulled his inadequate oilskins more closely about him and adjusted the canvas "apron" of the cockpit around his waist. None of the snow could get into the cockpit now. It was as though she were completely decked except for the circular hole in the apron—which was occupied by his body.

In a lull between snow-squalls he saw that the helmsmen of the two whalers had done the same. Five minutes later he had to loose the apron again to call a couple of the hands of the watch to reef the sail. The boat was plowing along at a clear seven knots—diagonally overtaken and passed by a driving white obscurity through which he could see nothing until he was a-top of it.

Unless he eased her she might well crash head-on into a floe before he could put his helm over to clear it—and that would be the end of her and probably most of those aboard her as well. Even if the whalers should be near enough to offer help, the men under these decks would never get out in time. For himself there would certainly be a better chance—but the icy water would probably have had its way with him before he could be picked out of it.

"Two reefs," he ordered.

With their loose-footed standing lugsail the job was easy, as reefing goes. They shifted the sheet-block to the second clew, easing up on the halliard so that the tack could be unhooked and hooked on again farther up the luff-rope; then they simply rolled up the foot of the sail to the second row of reef-points, tied them under the roll and hauled taut on the halliard again.

But out on that unsteady, snow-slippery deck, with only the life-lines to keep them from sliding overside with the growing motion of the boat, the two men had their hands full. They came aft again on hands and knees, their faces blue-gray and their fingers numb; and they had to be helped down into the cockpit and below again.

The whalers came looming out of the scurrying whiteness astern, rapidly overhauling the cutter now that her canvas had been reduced. As Rattray watched them he saw men come up on the deck of each to reef down also.

AFTER that they kept as close together as they dared, lest they lose each other in the thickening snow-flurries.

Rattray had hauled taut the apron-string about his middle again, and sat on at the tiller, huddling down as much as he could, very cold and getting colder every minute. He had already been chilled through and through by that searching S. S. E. wind from the frozen continent; his post at the helm gave him no chance to fight that chill with exercise. Admittedly the wind was warmer now—a snow-bearing wind always is—but that warmth was only relative. It would be more accurate to say that its cold was less. And his oilskins were worn and patched and had long since ceased to be waterproof or even wind-proof. The snow sifted in through the many chinks in his armor; and his already depleted body-heat was only just sufficient to melt it, so that trickles of snow water soaked him through as he sat.

Presently he could no longer feel the tiller in his hands, fur-mittened though they were; so he held it between right arm and side, swaying his body in order to steer. With his left arm he periodically brushed the ever-collecting snow from the glass of the little boat-compass, that he might see her course therein and keep her on it—between ice-dodgings. The water in his clothes had reached his feet now. He stamped them on the cockpit bottom-boards to save their circulation.

After a time some one seized his leg and shook it, shouting something inaudible. He had to open the apron to hear. It was a long job with his numbed hands.

It was Paton, wanting him to turn the little tin ventilators away from the wind, because the snow was coming down them among the men.

Rattray let the meteorologist out to do it himself. When Paton had finished he turned to Rattray before going down again.

"Your left cheek doesn't look too good," he shouted. "Let me give it a rub."

"Thanks. I'd rub it myself only I can't feel my hands any more. . . . But we're having a fine sail, aren't we? Nice to be moving again. We're still making five knots— Gosh! That was a near one!"

He had swung his body over to starboard, ramming the helm down. The cutter swung up towards the wind—her canvas thundering—and slid past a heaving floe which had seemed to spring out at her from the gray-white dimness ahead, slid past with no more than a foot to spare. Paton stood staring after it as it was swallowed astern.

Rattray got the boat back to her course and the scientist now turned to stare at him. The captain's face was drawn and quivering with cold but from his gray-hooded, indomitable eyes there shone a gleam that was almost of exultation. God! The man was *happy!*

Suddenly remembering something, Paton ducked down and came up again with a pannikin of steaming tea. "Out of my thermos," he explained. "Trembling's keeping it full—for the man at the helm."

Rattray gulped it down gratefully; but not for an instant had his eyes strayed from their keen watch ahead. Ice was getting more and more frequent; it became increasingly hard to swing the boat into safety in time. At last, at just on four o'clock, he narrowly missed an unsteadily-bobbing "growler" berg in trying to dodge another floe, shooting between the two with about a yard's grace on either side, his heart hammering in his throat, the whalers both crowding hard on his heels.

"We've tempted Providence enough for one day," he told Dane through blue lips. "Can't see a thing, and the ice is thickening all the time. Better find a nice, safe, flat floe and tie up to it, I reckon!"

Dane came out and had a look. "So do I!" he pronounced at once. "Dunno how you've kept going as long as you have! Tell the whalers."

Rattray bawled the order across to Whitehead, who had the tiller of Walters' boat; and the airman passed it on to Mills, who was keeping watch in Pearson's.

"Going to be a job picking out anything decent in this," said Dane, puckering his eyes. The Antarctic might have heard him, and called in at once the first law of Nature—which—as all her suitors know—is not self-preservation at all, but cussedness of the most exasperating kinds.

They sighted no ice at all for the next hour. After that the snowfall thinned for a little, giving them a range of vision of about two hundred yards. And by the time it had closed in again, all three boats were lying in the lee of a great hummocked floe that promised to be admirably safe and stable; and on it their crews danced and ran, to ease their cramped bodies and restore their sluggish circulations.

"We'll make the boats fast to the ice by their painters," said Dane in conference with Rattray and the other two boat-captains. "I don't want to haul 'em up till we absolutely have to—because if we do we can't sleep in 'em. Our own weight on top of their weight of stores might strain 'em. It'll be warmer—and drier—sleeping in the boats than on the ice.... Have to keep watch in each boat, of course, if only to keep 'em from bumping each other too much. And if this snow continues the decks'll have to brushed clear every now and then, or we'll be top-heavy by morning. . . . If it lets up and gives us any sort of visibility again we'll go on at once. . . . Ha! There's our stove started up. Hoosh in an hour's time, lads!"

"With beef-extract in it to-night," announced Paton. "*And* another biscuit per man! . . . Seen any seals around this afternoon?"

"Not a seal, Pater," answered Walters; and no one else had had any better fortune.

"Not surprised," said Dane. "Don't suppose they like this weather any more than we do. Oh, well, we can't be lucky *all* the time. Brrr! I'm going aboard again!"

It was pleasantly warm in the cutter—thanks largely to the "Sykes" stove. It was placed amidships, just for'ard of the cockpit; and was roaring full-blast now, with its collapsible chimney fitted and spouting its oily brown blubber-smoke into the scurrying snow-squalls overhead.

The scene below decks would have looked macabre enough to any one who could have peeped in, unprepared, from the cockpit. Bearded and unwashed and filthy as they all were with the inevitable soot and grease, they sprawled and crouched everywhere in their rags, among their stores and bedding, the fierce light from the stove catching their eyes so that they gleamed almost balefully through the smoky gloom. It had long been a standing joke that the only clean things left about any of them were their eyes and teeth; so that when a man smiled or laughed the effect was almost horrible—or would have been, at least, to any observer, unknowing and uninstructed of all they had for so many months endured. To the men themselves it had become a commonplace, noticed no more than the mud on the uniforms of trench-fighters, in war.

Warm they were; even Rattray had got warm again somehow, though he was far from dry. Before their meal was ready they had even become too warm. The leeward-tunnel ventilators were not giving them enough air. In the end they had to turn them to windward again, setting a tin under each on the bottom-boards to catch the drift of snow that came intermittently down.

"Decks don't seem to leak much, anyway," commented Dane presently. "They're warm enough to melt some o' the snow on 'em outside, I notice, but there's no sign of 'em weeping through yet."

Mackworth the carpenter grunted—which was his exuberant way of expressing pleasure at a compliment.

"Oughtn't to leak," amplified Rattray. "Double planking with canvas between. Chips didn't want to get wet any more'n the rest of us!"

"Grub-oh!" announced Trembling at this juncture; and the hoosh and biscuits were served out and passed round.

The former was soon disposed of, with lips that smacked their appreciation of the luxurious beef-extract flavoring; but after their epicure fashion they made the biscuits last, nibbling lovingly around the edges and savoring each tiny morsel with the satisfaction of gourmets at a City banquet.

Tarrant, who had developed a really expert technique in biscuit-eating, could generally manage to make his last a full hour.

After dinner Walters came over for half an hour, "ship-visiting," as he explained; and as he had a very fine bass-baritone voice and a good stock of songs with swinging choruses, they had what Dane called a "smoking-concert"—the only drawback to which was that none of them had any tobacco.

Then, by tacit consent, as one after another rolled himself in his blankets, the singing and talk died down and ceased. The captain of Number One Whaler went back to his "ship"; in all three the "anchor-watches" were set. Silence settled over the flotilla.

And thus, on a note of present well-being of body and of mutually-strengthened hope for the future, ended the first day of what Dr. Meldrum had rather happily described as "the migration of the *Springboks*."

IN THE months that lay before them, they were to become very familiar with the alarm: "All hands! All hands turn out!" They would come blundering out from their crowded holds, blinking in the low beams of the midnight sun, shuddering and huddling at first in the cold, their sleep-scattered wits fighting back to their waking cohesion, cursing the cause that had called them from their muddled but comforting dreams of home and food and relief-ships. . . .

This time it was a very simple cause, and urgent.

The floe with which they had been drifting, northwards and eastwards with the wind and current, had been steadily closing, with others, on the main pack; and only just in time did they get the boats hauled up to the comparative safety of its surface. A minute later, and no more, it collided with a dull impact and a great after-grinding, with the jostling mass of those other floes; gyrated a little, moved bodily forward in a series of dwindling lurches, and stopped dead.

And for the rest of that "night" there were few who could sleep through the almost continuous bang and clash and grind of the arrival-concussions of the following floes.

Apart from these ominous disturbances, their situation was comfortless enough in itself to banish sleep from all but the hardiest. The boats lay over at a considerable angle on the ice; to rest again therein at that angle would have been for most of them impossible, even had it not been inadvisable. So they had to pitch their tents and spread their bedding on the ice; and that was a chaotic enough business at the start, for everything had to be found and sorted out and carried from under the decks of the boats.

And the tents were cold after the snug quarters they had left; and there was trouble for some in finding surface fit to lie on, for the floe was anything but smooth; and also the ice melted with their body-heat (for the air was very little below freezing-point, with this snowing wind) and some of them were lying in puddles before the "morning"—puddles which overflowed the edges of their ground-sheets and made wet misery of their blankets and clothes.

But somehow the hours dragged by to their ending, hastened a little by the cocoa—hot enough but tastelessly weak—which the watchman made at four.

At last they rose again, stiffly, thanking God for the night's end, and fed more blubber to the tin-tray stoves, and looked about them with sleep-gummed, smoke-bleared eyes, and saw the pack before them, a jammed mass of hummocked and rafted confusion that stretched away over all the northern semicircle of the world as far as the eye could reach.

The hardest, if not the most dangerous, part of their forlorn sortie, was before them now. Over that chaotic pack (until perhaps it should drift apart again and give them respite) they must now begin to try and force a passage, by sheer power of limb and stoutness of steeled heart.

"Better have a shot at it," said Dane; "Shackleton or no Shackleton. We'll have breakfast and then march till the surface gets too bad. . . . I think in future we'd better do our marching from midnight onwards. There'll be a better surface at night—if you can call it night. We can stop when the daily thaw sets in. In fact, we'll have to. Probably about nine a.m. We shan't be able to do much this morning, I'm afraid."

"Hands to breakfast," did something to relieve the gloom.

While waiting for the meal, Dane and Rattray had gone forward a little way to prospect the best route.

Half an hour after breakfast the march began.

The labor was more toilsome than any one had dared imagine. The ice was rough, and slushy with the half-thawed snow upon it, covered by a thin but yielding crust formed by the slight frost overnight —a surface on which the heavy boats dragged horribly, despite the sledges under them.

It took the whole party to move the cutter; they had to lift and haul and manhandle her first, with sinew-cracking exertion, for a short hundred yards or so —then go back again for the whalers. Such "relaying" is horrible toil, whose disheartenment becomes more monstrous with every weary, counter-trudging repetition.

Fortunately the sea-swell was almost completely smothered by the close-rammed floes that floated on it. They had not to face, this day, the troubles and dangers of ice that moved and ground its splintering edges together beneath them. Nor, on the contrary, was there heavy pressure as yet in this pack—otherwise they might have found the floes up-ending and cracking and splitting apart underfoot. . . .

The Antarctic, it seemed, had *some* mercy for them—it piled its tortures piecemeal instead of *en masse*—and perhaps that saved them. For the weight which a man can carry when loaded bit by bit, with scientific calculation of time and stress and the accustoming to them of the human frame and spirit, would telescope and flatten him to the ground if thrown on at once, in one complete and crushing burden.

As it was, with nothing worse in sight ahead, they could not believe that anything *could* be worse than this abominable surface of slush-covered, snow-concealed chaos.

The ravages of previous winter-pressure —for much of this ice was old and thick— had shattered some of the floes to great jagged bowlders and then welded them together again. Then the spring gales had broken the mass once more into new floes, composite, conglomerate, with hardly a flat face among them. Snow-falls, subsequently packed and frozen by wind and cold, had tried to level them, perhaps had succeeded for a time, till the thaws of summer had undone their work and made their last state worse than the first.

Then—pressure again—a pack caught for hundreds of miles between the jaws of opposing gales: yielding, folding in upon itself, grinding its teeth in a helpless titan-agony. Under stresses—crushing, twisting, wrenching—that no man's brain could even conceive, its cemented floes would bend and break and lift (as a man is lifted from his feet in a panic-struck mob) to up-end slowly and fall right over in ponderous ruin, atop of their groaning brethren. Or they would be forced up together into a pressure-ridge like the hard-protruding, pain-knotted muscles at the side of the jaw when a man clamps his teeth to endure in silence, Or again, they would snap and slide up, one upon the other, like smashed and telescoped coaches in a head-on collision of railway trains.

And as if all that was not enough, there would then come thrusting a great berg, its huge under-surface irresistibly impelled by a sea-current beneath, plowing ahead in slow but implacable determination, as if it were some elemental Tank, sent by the Nature-God to tread out a lane through the rigid jam of a cosmic riot.

And always the groaning ice-masses closed in. There was no lane left behind.

Such was the pack through which Dane and his men now struggled, loosened apart since the last "pressure-period," and now jammed together again like pieces of a jig-saw puzzle swept together at random, so that there were many gaps, of irregular shapes and sizes, between the floes. The water in each of these had frozen "overnight"—but too thinly to bear a man's weight—and the snow had drifted them up level to make of them perfect man-traps, perfectly hidden—till one trod upon them and went through. . . .

ON THAT morning march they advanced only one ghastly, muscle-torturing half-mile; and for that the way had to be pioneered with picks and shovels and tools improvised—over pressure-ridges of ice-bowlders and leads filled with melting snow. They had had to go a circuitous way that covered nearly double their direct line of advance. And the relaying had trebled that again.

But at least the camp they made at the end of it was more comfortable than the last. They were warm, and there was some sun at intervals which did just a little to dry them and their gear.

After a meal a party went out to scour the ice for seals, but came back without success. Dane and Rattray went forward to choose the route for the next march—and their hearts sank as they did so. But . . . sufficient for the day. . . .

And presently they slept again, in their wet bedding; and the sun swung lower towards the west, and lower yet to the southward on its daily circling, sliding now behind a gathering grayness of cloud.

The pressure gradually increased. Beneath them the pack began to groan and creak. Half a mile away a floe split across with a bang like a heavy gunshot, rose slowly like an inverted V, and was crunched together at its base so that one side fell back flat again, to smash into a dozen immense pieces. The other side remained standing, like a slanting monolith, seventeen feet in thickness and forty in height.

And this thing might happen at any time to the floe on which the boats were resting; though to be sure they would not be denied warning, of creakings and crackings and shuddering movement. Then the watch would call all hands to shift to safer quarters.

The chance, however, of such an alarm was reasonably small. Here one had to leave something to chance but, like Rattray, Dane was wont to give that unkind goddess no more scope than could possibly be helped. Wise in the ways of the pack, he always chose for their camping-place the strongest and biggest and safest-looking floe that he could find.

That "evening" the temperature went down nearly to zero; and just before midnight it was lowered still further by a keen wind from the continent they had left.

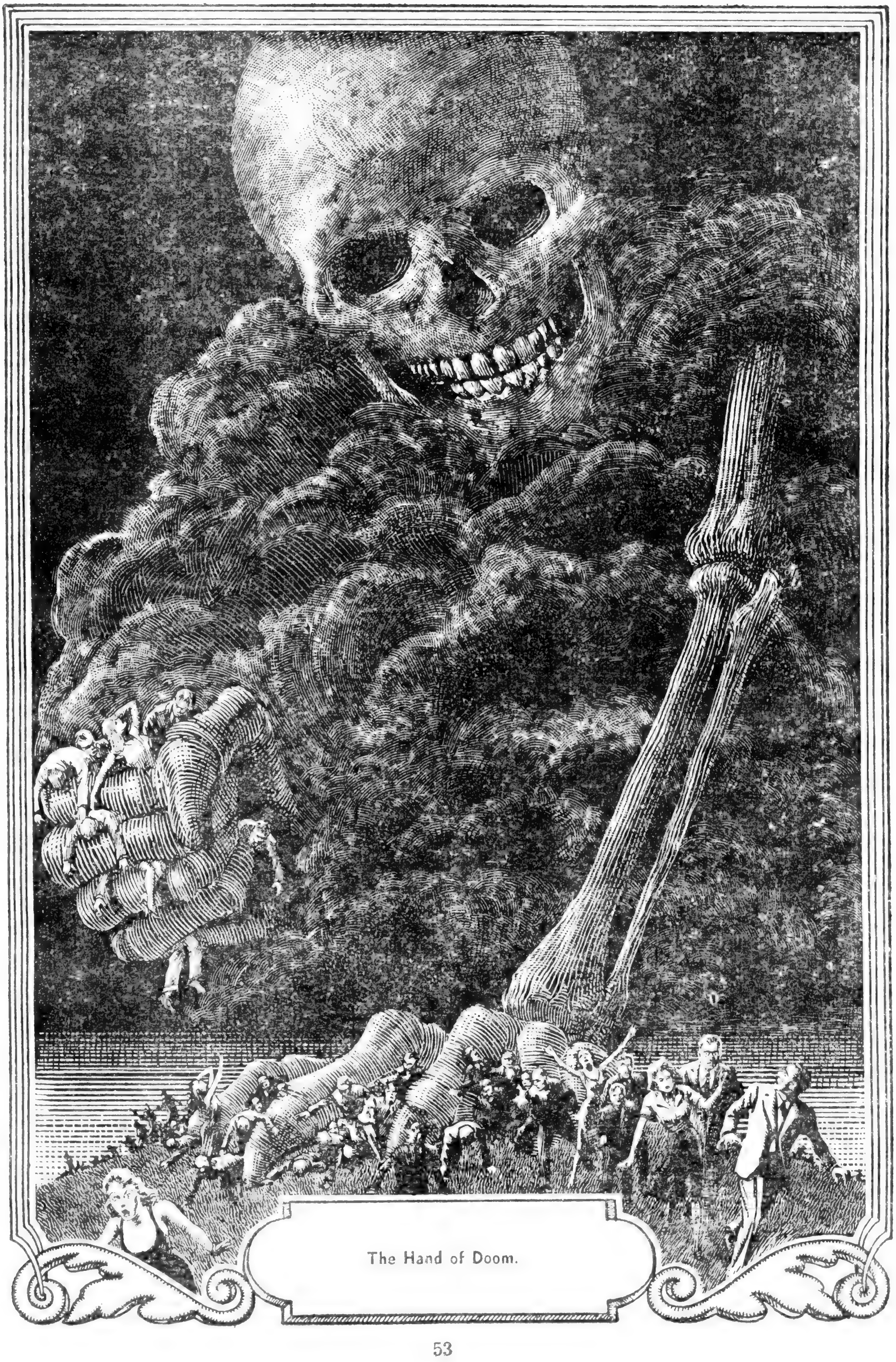
At 12 o'clock the watchman lit the blubber-stove and called the hands. They crawled out shivering, painfully pulling on their frozen boots—and some of them cursed at sight of their mittens, frozen stiff and solid. Deceived by the warmth of the air on turning in, they had neglected to put those essential hand-protectors inside their shirts, against the skin, that the heat of their bodies might keep the wet fur from freezing. They never forgot that precaution again.

Had it not been for the utter, wretched wetness of all their clothes and bedding, they would have welcomed the cold of this night-marching program. It did mean a slightly better surface for the boat-hauling and, had their gear been dry to start with it would have been possible to keep it at least reasonably free from the soddenness which can make Antarctic travel such a comfortless misery. But everything was wet already, the sun of the previous afternoon had had far too little time to be of any real help, and the stoves were quite inadequate for the purpose, even had there been fuel to spare for it—which there was not. With the amount of seal-blubber they had been able to carry with them, it was all they could do to cook their indispensable hot meals and drink.

So the cold of this midnight arising chilled their blood. The breakfast hoosh was comforting but inadequate as always. Then the march began again, and the exertion warmed them a little. But again, despite the better surface that the cold had made, their progress was terribly slow.

After a nightmare struggle, they halted for the "midday" meal—at four a.m. They had covered perhaps three-quarters of a mile in a direct line.

At five they went on again—and there is no profit in dilating on the killing labor of it. It is enough to say that when, a little after nine o'clock, they camped again, utterly exhausted, they had done another paltry thousand yards. And even that pace was too hot to last. To replace its enormous squandering of body-strength only the most complete and scientifically-balanced rations would have sufficed. But their food was not balanced, nor was it even enough. They were like engines which must draw their trains over a line gone mad, though marsh and rock-choked desperations of desolation—without fuel enough, or even of the right kind, for their fires. Fuel they had to have—and they could only make it up from the reserves in their own bodies. At that rate it could only be a matter of time before they had exhausted those reserves—whereupon they



The Hand of Doom.

must come to a stop—a *final* stop indeed.

They labored up to the chosen camping-floe now with the scant breath wheezing from bodies that staggered and only half obeyed the orderings of minds half stupefied by the grimness of the road—a road so plainly impossible.

"If it's going . . . to be like this . . . much farther," gulped Kildale as he reeled down to the ice, "we'll . . . never make it."

"Well, don't let . . . any one hear you . . . say so," panted Knibbs in reply.

The pressure had relaxed a little. During this last half of their "march" a drain of sea-swell had come along under the pack from somewhere, causing the floes to move a little, with jerky undulations, grinding together with huge noises of embattlement, so that a new unsteadiness had been added to that of hunger and leg-weariness, and new dangers for men and boats to outwit as they had toiled, almost crying, over this Antarctic bedlam. . . .

"I'm afraid, after all," said Dane "that we're going to have to go through the hoop the same as Shackleton did—in spite of your idea about the different conditions, Skipper. We *can't* go on like this. Hardly more than two miles—in two days! Even if we could keep it up, it would take us three months to cover a hundred. And we can't. We're damn' near done already. . . . The northward drift's our hope. Don't you see it for yourself? . . . Say five months for the drift to take us out. It's *bound* to do it in time. Well, what difference would *our* efforts make—even assuming we could go on making any for more than another day or two?"

"We don't *know* what the drift's doing," argued Rattray. "Without any means of finding our position from time to time, we *can't* know. . . . Still, I've got to agree with you. We can't go on. . . . We'll just have to make ourselves as comfortable as we can, on the biggest and safest floe we can find, and hope the drift *will*. . . ."

"After all, if we do that, we can keep alive on the same rations we had in the hut," went on the leader, half to himself. "We can send parties out every day to bring in seals. Bound to find some. And there's the Emperors too. . . . Another thing. I haven't given up *all* hope of a plane coming. . . . I *can't* give up all hope. only a lot of absolute *fiends* would leave us in the lurch like this. . . . If they find the note I left at the hut they'll search for us—and they'll be bound to find us. Given one clear day to search in they'd pick us up, with a plane's range of action—and sight. . . . As regards the drift, we may be able to find out on Mid-summer Day how far north it's taken us—"

"If the sun'll only shine, at the right time, for a meridian observation," put in Rattray, ignoring Dane's other comments.

"Well, it's only eighteen days off. If we do get our latitude, it'll only be approximate, of course. We'll have to guess the refraction for a start. The other corrections don't matter so much. . . . I reckon we're about forty miles north of Mills Bay now. Let's hope we'll be able to find out where we are on the 22nd. . . . Anyhow, we've got to make a permanent camp. I'll tell the men after hoosh."

He told them.

They took it well—though perhaps that was not so very remarkable, since his decision meant no more of that horrible boat-hauling. They had given up looking very far ahead. A permanent camp would mean some return of comfort, a chance to rest, and dry their clothes. . . . They left the worrying to John Dane.

That afternoon the hunters came back with two seals and an Emperor penguin—their first stroke of luck.

By that time Dane had selected a strong, heavy floe some four hundred yards away, thick enough to resist all but the most terrific pressure or the most determined thaw, and nearly a mile across. It would carry their camp with as near an approach to safety as they could expect, in their situation, to find. On the morrow they would move the boats across and bed them down in the ice, so that their planking rested evenly on it. Then they could once more sleep aboard, if they wanted to, without risk of their combined weight straining the ribs.

"So all we'll have to do," Dane told them at supper, "is pray for southerly weather to help blow us along." He looked around the irregular circle of listening men, grinning his famous grin. "The secret of success in this world," he added, "is to find a job where you can sit back and watch some one else do the work. That's called 'marked executive ability.' We're going to be executives now, and let the wind and currents work for us a bit. It's time they took a turn, anyway. *We've* earned a rest. Ye-es, I *think* so!"

But for himself he could not practice what he had preached. Not yet. Resignation does not come at the bidding of the will, however irresistible its logic may be. There was no rest for Dane, either in body or mind.

Bidding the watchman sleep with the others, he slipped quietly out from the silent camp—to face his Gethsemane alone. . . .

MIDSUMMER Day came and went without so much as a glimpse of the sun. They hardly cared. They were living entirely in the present now. Even Dane had forced his anxieties from his mind; even Rattray no longer calculated what the Antarctic might yet do to them, forgot to be always planning against it.

They had settled to a routine.

They were surrounded by a white desolation of tumbled ice, mile upon square mile of it, a cemented mass the size of Ireland and more, all under a sky of unrelieved gray cloud—from which, at intervals, the snow came drifting down. There was one dark speck in all that floating whiteness, from which, at intervals, there crawled tiny black mites, like ants from a hole, in search of food. Three ship's boats were placed in a triangle, the space between them roofed with their sails and floored with sealskins and bottom-boards—and forty smoke-grimed men in tattered rags labored amid a loneliness as of Outer Space itself.

They hunted seals and took their turns with the flensing and butchering and cooking of them; they ate and slept and talked the time away. They no longer felt discomfort in the grease and soot that befouled them; and what remained of their clothing had become a second skin.

It was not that they were content—no man could have been content—but that they had learned better than to long for the unattainable, at least in their waking hours.

In their sleep it was a different story. Dreams had been frequent, even in the hut—dreams of food, of relief, of disaster, of home; dreams that muddled all four together; and occasionally, nightmare unalloyed. They were like men compelled to journey along a road beset with secret abysses, as a glacier is beset with deep crevasses, each hidden under a treacherous "snow-bridge": a mental pilgrimage of constant peril, in which they had to help one another, as it were roping themselves together, that if one should tread unawares on one of those bridges and fall through towards the dark, he could be hauled back to safety by the others.

That rope had really linked them all from the begining, ever since the *Springbok* had gone, and even before; and through all the past winter, despite many strains and chafings between diverging personalities, it had been growing ever stronger. By now it was become as a hawser of tempered steel, that nothing but death—or insanity—could break. Danger and disaster—aye, or even the cumulative wretchedness of daily physical discomfort and lack—may in the end subdue the bodies, or take away the minds, of such as these; but for as long as body and brain endure, the Spirit is but fortified by such adversity. A lump of common charcoal, soft and easily broken though it is, can yet be changed and compacted, by the enormous stresses of the under-earth, to a diamond imperishably lasting—*and incomparably fine.*

They were still organized in boats' crews, under the boats' officers; and between the three was always a pleasant if forthright rivalry of word and deed. The three took turns as the day's "duty-boat" to supply cooks and camp orderlies and watchmen and hunting-parties and each boat's tally of seals and penguins brought in was carefully kept and compared—with much argument.

In that strange way known to men who have been cut off and thrown together in the outer wastes, they had a certain happiness of their own, undefined and indeed indefinable. They had become a trinity of families, bound together in a greater unity—even as their boats were bound by the ridge-ropes and backbone of the central tent.

By now those boats had names; as also, collectively, had their crews. The cutter was the *Colliery*—because of the intense blackness of her interior, legacy from Sykes stove—now, however, set up in the tent; and her men, naturally, were the "miners." On account of her captain's power of vocal entertainment, the first whaler had become *"the Tivoli"* and its men Carusos. The other whaler, over whose destinies presided Mr. Pearson, was obviously, by force of antithesis to the characteristics of Mr. Walters' command, known as *"the Pig-Market"*—wherein, proverbially, there is and should be silence. It was hard, but inevitable, that her crowd should have to bear the name of "hogs."

But the whole was a kingdom, a little floating kingdom on an Antarctic ice-floe; and its king's authority was never questioned even in thought. Its exercise was rarely needed. Apart from that implicitly accepted command, there was nothing now to distinguish John Dane from one of his own able seamen. Occasionally, it is true, he and Rattray would withdraw a little from the others—with Paton, perhaps, or Ransome or Walters to make a third—for discussion on some camp matter, or their possible rate of drift.

A careful meteorological record was kept; and the little it could tell them, for the first month on the floe, was not hopeful. Southerly weather undoubtedly had predominated during December. They had made perhaps forty miles in the boats—nearly all that distance under sail, on the first day—before they had been forced to give up the attempt to move over the pack. If their rate of drift was the same as Shackleton's had been—as nearly as any of them could remember that rate, for of course they had no books to go by—then they ought to have added another sixty at least by now. Assuming that they had, then already they were one-third of the way to the open ocean, according to Dane's estimate of where the open ocean began—which might, of course, be wrong. . . .

New Year's Day was celebrated somewhat as Midwinter Day had been in the hut.

But this time they could not afford to open out much on their reserve-provisions. Seal, at least, was banished for the day. For their meat-course they concentrated on the far tastier "Emperor" penquin; and the evening meal was rounded off with biscuits and raisins, and cocoa that one could actually taste—having a little sugar in it also. And from the medical stores—which were almost complete, having been landed first of all from the *Springbok* and jealously treasured ever since—Dr. Hay produced (with the air of a stage-conspirator) a whole bottle of best Cape brandy. It did not go far among forty men—but for a little while afterwards they all swore they could feel a pleasant tingling in their blood, and Meldrum even pretended to be "tight," with uproarious results.

AFTER that there were choruses, led by the indefatigable Walters; and Captain Rattray, responding most unwillingly to insistent popular demand, was at length persuaded and assisted to mount the *"Colliery's"* deck and make a speech.

"Mr. Ou Baas, Ladies and Gentlemen," he began. "Sorry. Mr. Ou Baas and Gentlemen. There aren't any ladies." (Cries of: "Why not? Where are they? Fetch 'em out and let's have a dance!") "Shut up, you asses, and let me—" ("Order!") "You damned young fools, you're all blotto, that's what's the matter with you! What's the use—" ("Wish we were. 'Nother bottle, Doc!") "Anyhow, here we are. New Year's Day. Er—"

He paused, was tumultuously cheered, and got thankfully down from the deck. Knibbs mounted in his place.

"I'm—ah—very glad," he began in an astonishingly mincing falsetto voice, "to see so many bright happy faces here this afternoon. I—ah—hope most sincerely that you will show no mer-cay to the ginger-be-ah and the buns. . . . Oh, you perishing sons of darkness, go away and wash yourselves! . . . The Reverend Doctor Kildale, B.F., will now address you. Don't crack nuts while he's speaking. Dr. Kildale!"

The geologist arose. "Haaa! H'rr'umm! My dear brethren. As we are, I am told, now embarking on the New Year," he intoned very solemnly, "I feel that we ought to have a maypole. I am sure I do not know why. But that feeling is very strong upon me. In default of the correct article, Mr. Ransome might do. Er—"

"Hic!" yelled Doctor Meldrum. "Shree—shcushe me!—sheers for Misheranshum—Hanshum — the human —oooo*ick* — lamposht!"

But as the lanky hydrographer was one of the "Hogs," his fellow-baconers swarmed forthwith to his defense; and in a minute there was a sort of triangular combat between them and the Carusos and the Miners.

It was good-natured horse-play while it lasted, but it could not have lasted for long. They were none of them as strong as they once had been. But as it happened, the "war" was interrupted.

There sounded from underfoot a loud and sudden *crack*.

For Knibbs, the electrician, it was for a moment as if he were back on the breaking ice-wharf at Mills Bay. He started instinctively, as he had done then, half expecting to see the ice open at his feet.

A silence fell upon every one. They looked about them, sharply, in a great tension of waiting. Nothing happened.

The sun came out, low in the southwest, in a level lane between the clouds, bathing the still scene with its pale light.

Then, all a-mutter around them, they heard the pack's awakening. There was a creaking, and a grunting, a grind and clash of rubbing and colliding floe-edges such as they had not heard for weeks. These were not the noises of pressure.

They had heard *those* noises often enough—and watched, day by day, the slow, stealthily-creeping approach of the pressure-lines and ridges from which those noises had come.

This . . . this was something *different!*

A black head appeared from behind a rubble of ice-boulders, at the edge of their floe. It was followed by a black body, long and dripping. A seal. Come up from the water, where no water had been. A newly-opening lead! The neighboring floe had always been tightly jammed just there. In fact, those ice-bowlders had been broken off it and forced up during a night of heavy pressure, just over a week ago.

But that cracking sound underfoot? Was their own floe weakening? Was it going to break in half? Dane's voice came sharply.

"Stand by, every one! I think the whole pack's loosening right up!"

Words of tingling hope. Would it loosen enough to let them launch the boats? Hardly likely. Shackleton had never been able to lauch his, although the pack had often loosened. It did not loosen sufficiently. That was the trouble.

Silence again.

"I suppose it *must* be the brandy," said Knibbs presently. "I'm surprised at myself. One half-tot, and I'm not steady on my legs!"

"Same here!" agreed Whitehead.

"It's *not* the brandy!" shouted Walters. "Look at the pack! *Look to the nor'west'ard!* There's a swell coming in under it again! And—and—isn't the sky a bit darker over there?"

Darker? By the Lord, it *was!* A water-sky. Open water to the nor'west'ard! Open water!

The grinding grew louder every minute. And ever more frequently there came the sounds of clashing and splitting floes as they heaved and sank in that long, low swell.

It looked as though the New Year might be beginning none too badly for the Dane Expedition.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CLENCHED HAND

ALL that night and all the next day the noise and the movement increased, but never did any lane open widely enough for the boats, nor would it have been safe to launch them if it had. The floes ground together too often in that swell from the unseen sea.

All around, as far as they could see, there were little plumes of spray shooting up from those collisions. Big and heavy and thick as it was, their own floe had not much motion; but the battering it endured from the others was nibbling it away just as they were wont to nibble their biscuits, from the edges inwards.

And also it was thawing! Its days were numbered.

"May start splitting any time," said Rattray on the morning of the 3rd; and Dane nodded, watching.

The great ice-mass moved ponderously, slowly, with no recognizable sea-motion, for it covered a dozen and more of the sea-undulations at once. Nevertheless it was the swell that would give it its death-blow. As long as it had rested evenly on water calmed by the immense extent of the pack all around, the only stresses it had had to bear were those of pressure, and its only other enemy the slow summer thaw. But now it was lifted and supported unevenly, with practically straight lines of "hogging-strain" cross-swell, and a "sag" between each and the next.

It could only be a matter of time before these new stresses told. The first noise of cracking underfoot had been omen enough of that.

A little after noon a wind rose from the same direction as the swell; rose and freshened, blowing wetly with the spray it picked up from those bursts between the fighting floes. And as the smaller floes of the pack suffered in their fighting, and were broken smaller and smaller, so the sea rose higher and less restrained.

Out on to the larger floes, for safety from that mighty mill, crept seal after seal. That afternoon they killed enough to last them a fortnight; only desisting because to kill more would have been waste, and they never killed needlessly. The other seals watched, quite unconcerned, while they flensed and butchered carcasses—amid a skirling scurry of greedy gulls.

On that night Dane and Rattray kept the watches while the others slept, for their situation was now too critical to be watched over by less experienced eyes.

To each the lonely hours seemed endless, and neither could sleep when his turn came. So in the end they sat and stood and walked together, in a guardian companionship that was for the most part silent, for both were too anxious for much speech. At any moment their floe might start to break up—might even split asunder, perhaps through the middle of their camp. Such a thing *had* happened to others placed as they were now.

About four the wind eased and died away; by five it seemed that the motion had become less; by six the swell was clearly subsiding. When the cooks of the day were called to light the stoves it had almost ceased, and the silence was descending once more upon the weakened pack. The time for their release was not yet.

Shortly after breakfast a wind came from the south and drove the floes together again. But still the water-sky showed darkly in the northwest. It was horribly tantalizing to look at it, and to know that beneath it, just beyond the white horizon, there was open sea. For they could do nothing to reach it. The ice was ten times more impassable now than it had been when first they had tried to drag their boats over it. It was rotten, half thawed, broken up. Compared with what they had been only a few hours before, the floes were little more than a floating rubble with a few larger islands, like their own, lying prisoned in its midst.

They had to be patient. Their release could not now be much longer delayed. Some of them even thought that they could see the water-sky extending upwards, towards the zenith. Was this southerly blowing them towards it, towards that longed-for place of dispersion, where the pack-stream had its mouth, and was dissipated? Was it the Southern Indian Ocean which darkened those heavens so alluringly? Or was it just a lake of clear sea, surrounded by ice?

Probably only the latter: it would not do to harbor false hopes. They could not be anywhere near the Antarctic Circle as yet, and the normal northern limit of pack-ice must still be far ahead. Yet—one never knew. The season *might* be an unusually open one. . . .

At noon, "just for fun," as he put it, Dane took the sun's altitude with Ransome's sextant. It was thirteen days from Midsummer; so as a rough guess he reckoned the sun would have moved north some two degrees from its "farthest south" of twenty-three, thirty. It was all very rough indeed; even that "farthest south" figure was not strictly accurate.

But it could be relied on to a couple of "minutes," or sixtieths of a degree, and a minute of latitude only equals a mile; probably his guess of a two-degree northward movement of the sun was very much more inaccurate; and the refraction alone was a factor in his observed altitude that he could only approximately guess. But after allowing as best he could for all error, he made the altitude 43°17′. Subtracting that from 90 gave a "zenith-distance" of 46°43′—their angular distance from that spot in the Tropics, far to the north of them, where the sun was right overhead. The latitude of that spot he had already guessed as 21°30′ south—two degrees north of the Tropic of Capricorn. Adding that to his 46°43′, he got 68°13′ as their own latitude. The Antarctic Circle—his assumed northern limit of pack—was 66°30′. So, according to his very empirical calculations, they were now within 2°43′ of it—163 nautical miles. It looked just a little too good to be true. . . .

That night, in the utter stillness, not an hour after the camp had settled to sleep, and without any reason that any one could afterwards determine, the floes just loosed their mutual grip—and began to drift apart.

And by noon of the next day the gaps had widened enough to let them launch the boats.

Dane boarded each as she floated again, anxious to see if the rough treatment of their first days in the pack had opened any seams. But as yet they all seemed taut enough.

Ten minutes later, with half her crew towing with the long grapnel-rope along the ice, the cutter moved off—to a cheering and a chanteying that warmed the blood and set it coursing as not for many weeks had it moved.

It seemed ages since the boats had last been in their rightful element; the memory of their travail over those appalling ice-surfaces seemed hardly less remote. The hut at Mills Bay was a half-forgotten dream. England—South Africa? Hotels and trains and streets, mountains and woods and green grass? Women and lights and music? Were there such as these, in the same world as *this?*

So Knibbs, for one, suddenly found himself wondering, as he hauled on the second whaler's tow-rope; and at a thought which came to him he burst into open laughter.

"What's the joke?" asked his neighbor, one of the seamen, with a sympathetic grin.

"It just struck me," explained the electrician, "that there must be a 'Children's Hour' treacling up the ether all around us, right as this very moment—if we could only pick it up."

The incongruously odd information was

passed, with a *feu de joie* of chucklings, from man to man and boat to boat. Doctor Meldrum added verisimilitude to the saying by rendering his celebrated imitation of an entertainer whom he was pleased to call "Uncle Raspberry."

But the real humor of the remark was lost on them. Inevitably. They might see it later, those who remembered.

THEY were unable to hold anything like a direct course. Most of the floes, though far smaller than they had been, were still of such a size and thickness that even the *Springbok* could not easily have pushed them aside. With only manpower, the boats had to go wherever the water-lanes were wide enough to give them passage, taking such channels as they hoped, in the aggregate, would give them an average northerly direction.

When the men who were towing came to the end of one floe, they hauled the boat alongside and used her as a bridge to the next. Sousings were frequent on that rotten ice: by the end of a watch every man as a rule had fallen in, usually more than once, and was wet through, the rags that had been his clothes flapping soggily and dropping from off him like molting feathers.

But what matter? Each man had left *something* of his clothing aboard, and they had their blankets to fall back upon. Pearson, hardy fellow, preferred, when his turn at the tow-rope came, to discard everything—his argument being that a wet skin by itself wasn't nearly so cold and uncomfortable as a wet skin plus wet rags. But then, Pearson had very little to discard by now. . . .

It was warming work anyhow, man's work; and because of that work (oh, joy of joys!) Paton had already opened up again on the biscuit-boxes.

Sometimes a water-lane would come to a full stop, its end plugged with ice, having no way out for them except that by which they had come. Then they would either have to go back and try another lead or haul the boats bodily over the ice till they found water for their keels again. But such impasses were mercifully few that day. If anything, the ice seemed to be getting even looser as time passed.

They tried not to think of the ever-imminent possibility of its closing on them again. They simply went on living for the moment. It was the only thing to do. At the moment they were averaging nearly two miles an hour.

When the hour came for the evening meal they did not stop and camp. Time was too precious. They resumed their sea-routine. There was nothing to hold them back, and not a man but was glad and eager to go on. They were reeling off the miles. Already, in seven hours, they must have covered as much, in a direct line, as the drift of the great floe they had left would have been likely to take them in three days. If only they could go on like this they would tow till they dropped.

So they towed the cutter in three watches of six each, and the whalers with four to a rope; while in the boats themselves the stoves flared up and the evening "hoosh" was cooked.

Midnight, and the watches were changed. Four a.m., and they were changed again.

About the middle of this "first morning" watch there came up a wind from the southeast. Also, the pack was drifting clearer every minute now, so that sometimes there were jolly little short seas, spray-tigged, in the lanes. It was a fair wind.

The cutter called in her men and joyfully hoisted her mains'l; the whalers followed suit. Four—five miles an hour now! and oh! the luxury of lying on one's blankets, or even sitting in the cockpit, or out on deck, in the sun, shouting jests and "leg-pulls" from boat to boat—and all the time the wind doing the work! One could nibble one's morning biscuit in comfort again, taking just as long about it as one cared. (Tarrant set up a new record of seventy-two minutes that day.)

Marvelous, the power of recovery in the human frame: already these were new men. With the re-issuing of the biscuit-ration the life flowed hourly back into their long-enervated bodies. Wonderful, the clearing and brightening of the brain and spirit, now that they were moving forward again.

Inexpressibly lovely, the song of the water under the bows.

They slept, ate, yarned; while the ice slipped by on either side and their tatters dried slowly on the warmed and grateful flesh.

"Wonder how far the open water is now?" asked Tarrant, coming up to take his afternoon trick at the cutter's helm.

"Can't be too far, now," Rattray told him, handing over. "You may see it ahead before you turn over to the Ou Baas, for all I can say. Don't forget to call me if you do! I could do with a sight of open sea again. By God, I could! . . . Well, we're trying to steer an average course of north nineteen east by compass—which is true north as near as we can get round a floe ahead, turn to port if you can round the next one. That evens things as near as you can expect. . . . You'll find it best to give Williams the helm — he's the smartest steersman in your watch—and con her from the deck. You can see more ahead if you stand up to it; and you want good warning of any dead-ends so as to get the the sail brailed up and the way off her in time. We don't want to bash her bows in. . . . Can do?"

"Good enough, I see the idea. Here's Williams now, so I'll go for'ard."

The boats sailed on, twisting and turning in the tortuous water-channels, reefed down so as not to exceed walking-pace. Faster they dared not go; and even as it was one had to look and think well ahead, with the most unremitting vigilance, ready at any time to brail the wind out of the sail and ease the force of impact with ice in front. The other four men of the watch were ready to take up most of that impact, with poles out from the foredeck. They squatted there at Tarrant's feet, in instant preparedness—Sykes the engineer, Trembling the cook, Wootton his own colleague on Paton's meteorological staff, and — Paton himself.

Here, indeed, was a paradox typical of the way the Dane Expedition did things—the way they had done things from the beginning.

On board the *Springbok*, coming south from Capetown, the scientific staff had been a part of the ship's company, taking their turn in the ship's work—even going aloft, some of them, to help hand and reef the sails. Had the shore-party been able to carry out its pre-determined program of scientific work and sledging exploration, the seamen who were to have landed with it would have requited the scientists by acting as their helpers. Now, in their attempt to win to the world again, the scientists had resumed their old rating once more. In fact, every man in each boat did what came to his hand. Were they not yachtsmen all, with equal amateur status, honorary members of the Royal Cape Club? Were they not yachting now? As if to prove the matter, the Club's pennant was flying at the cutter's main-truck, its crown and anchor golden on the red, and the blue fly streaming in the wind. (It had been Walters' first care to salvage that bunting from the main-to' gallant head, after the *Springbok* had gone down.)

The bonds of comradeship had tightened close. They knew every man his neighbor, to the core. And each was for all. Between all they shared one soul—and that soul was centered there in this brave-flying flag, on the cutter's mainmast. From the world's viewpoint, perhaps, they had lost all that made life worth the living: but they had gained something, in that loss, which the world had never known—and would not have known how to value or understand.

They had long since given up looking for any help from the world. There had been ample time, now, for a ship to have reached Mills Bay and found the letter Dane had left there; more than ample time for her plane to have searched for and found them—*their* plane, promised to them before ever they had left the Cape. . . .

But they had given up thinking about it by now. Even the bitterness of reaction after continually-disappointed hope had passed away. They had almost forgotten the world itself. They were a community of their own, self-contained, self-sufficing; their lives depended on themselves, and on themselves alone. The very goal of their striving, even, had slipped back out of their conscious thoughts, to become a background to the effort itself.

It has been said that they lived in the present. The present was good. They were making fine progress to the northward, and was there not that water-sky ahead?

But when Dane took over at four there was still no sign of open sea, though he knew by the sky that it must be nearer.

At about half-past six the wind began to drop; by seven it was clearly dying. The floes were too far apart to be used for towing again: if the wind dropped altogether the only way they could get along would be by rowing—and they had made that very difficult with their decks. One man could pull, after a fashion, in the cockpit; another could help his by double-banking, facing for'ard with his hands also on the looms; but progress would be slow and they would have to be often relieved.

Dane cursed under his breath. It would be just like the contrariness of Nature, now that a stretch of real good going was almost in sight, to deny them the means to take advantage of it.

"Down sail," he ordered resignedly, a quarter of an hour later. "Out oars!"

And so they toiled on, their speed much reduced now, moving at little more than a mile an hour, with great labor.

But—just before midnight Dane reached a hand into Rattray's cubby-hole alongside him, and seized that sleeping mariner gently by the ear.

"Come out," he said, "and see what Daddy's found."

Ahead of them, deep-hued, with horizon clear-cut, infinitely grateful to eyes long dazzled by the white cruelty of the pack, stretched a calm expanse of open blue.

THE twenty-fifth day of April!

From horizon to shrouded horizon, under a dawn-sky of lurid gray, marched the seas of the southern Westerlies, incalculably powerful, almost a quarter of a mile from a crest to high-flung crest, each a charging liquid hill white-veined and marbled by the boiling ragings of the last, and wrinkled by the angry embattlement of the lesser seas which criss-crossed them—and endless succession of endless sea-ranges, their slopes glittering wickedly green as they leapt and loped and swept along, titanically tireless, around the circle of the earth.

Deep in the troughs of them, caught up and swung to the sky by the crests, boxed reeling this way and that by the punching knuckles of ridge after ridge of toppling, whitened water-walls, struggled three weary little shapes. Gray and ragged strained the canvas from their match-stick masts; battered, ice-scarred and streaming, their galled bows lifted and were whelmed and lifted again. Tiny, drooping, emaciated, sat their bearded, blanket-swathed helmsmen.

No other life showed in those cockpits: for all that John Dane knew, it might be that no one lived, now, except himself and Whitehead, and—was it Pearson, or Mills, in the second whaler? In his own boat, the cutter, there had been no sound of life below decks for some hours—he did not know how many hours, for of late he had been steering subconsciously, as a man may sleep sometimes, open-eyed and still marching, on his feet in the tired ranks of a moving army.

One on either side of him lay Tarrant and old Rattray, very still in their boarded bunks.

About an hour before, with the coming of the light, he had struggled back to conscious volition and knocked vainly on Rattray's hinged partition-door, with the knuckles of his half-clenched left hand. (It had been like that for days now, for his nerveless fingers would not straighten.) There had come no answer to his knocking. Was Rattray . . . dead? Slowly, now, his brain revolved around that prospect. The dear old Skipper! If so, he, Dane, would have like to have shaken hands with him first. . . .

But, of course, Rattray was asleep. So was Tarrant. They had a right to sleep. It was their watch below, wasn't it? But . . . how long had *he* been at the helm? Hadn't he tried to rouse them both, first one and then the other, at intervals, all through the horrible long night—the night whose end he had himself thought never to see?

He could not knock again. The power of his arms was gone now.

But he could still steer! Possibly he might go on steering before this gale for ever. Round and round the world! There was nothing in the way except Cape Horn—and he would probably miss that all right. An odd thought, with a fallacy in it somewhere. . . .

But there was nothing *in* the steering. With the tiller under his armpit one merely swayed the body. It was quite easy to bend sideways. Too easy—up to a point. What stopped him at that point? Oh, yes—the canvas apron of the cockpit, pulled taut around him and up over one shoulder, so that his left arm was under it. . . .

How long since his last bite of food? How long since the last of the paraffin had been used in the primus? He could not remember. Some days ago—or was it weeks? How far to the Crozets? Oh, God, how much farther? Had they passed them already, and Kerguelen too? Surely not—not *yet*. . . . There was a long way to go, still, wasn't there? Too long. They could not make it.

That damned pack. . . . Vaguely he recalled a gracious expanse of calm water, and dear old Rats coming out to look at it. They had hoped then—what hopes!—that their worst troubles had been over. But it had been just a flash in the pan, a lake in the pack, a blue, derisive Eye peeping up to watch them and mock them, from the center of that white horror of malignance. Ice! More ice! And hardly a seal upon it. Months and months in its loathly grip. . . .

God! What was the matter with the second whaler?

She was yawing aside from her course, broaching-to. Where was Pearson — or Mills? A crumpled figure, fallen half forward, held up still by his cockpit-apron. And that apron was heaving strangely, or perhaps his sight wavered. No! It was some one underneath, trying to get out. Suddenly the lax figure of the helmsman disappeared. Another took its place, half lifting an arm towards him. Another took its place, half lifting an arm towards him. Pearson.

Took some killing, young Pearson.

"Oh, Rats, old man—come out!" Dane tried to whisper; but the words formed only in his brain. "If you'd only put your hand out. . . ."

Was that a stirring of life in the port bunk? Or had it been just the rolling of an inert body, as the boat heaved up? No!

He heard the flap-door fall down, felt fumbling fingers about his own body. The apron fell slack as the cord came loose.

A gray-bearded face appeared; half lifted; moved; blinked its too bright eyes, in their skeleton-like setting, in the sudden light. The blue lips twisted under the draggled mustache, twisted in desperate attempt to speak.

Then:

"Did you call me?" rasped the voice of Captain Rattray.

Yes. Dane *had* called him . . . back to life.

"Here! What. . . ?" went on that terrible hoarse half-whisper. "Jack—you're all in!"

Dane fell forward, even as the figure in the second whaler had fallen; and rolled stiffly into the bottom of the cockpit, all doubled up, just as he had been sitting at the helm.

Rattray's hand came up to the tiller just in time. In another second the cutter would have swung off broadside. Feebly he stamped with his feet on the grating, trying to shout to the men below.

"Sykes! Mackworth!" He paused, and tried to swallow, remembering that the carpenter and the chief engineer were dead. "Here, wake up, down there, some of you! The Ou Baas is down again! Morris! Williams! Hell's bells, isn't *anybody* coming? All doubled up—like he was last time—and nobody to rub him! *Oh, damn the lazy, sleeping lubbers—he'll die!"*

It was no good. His pitiful voice could never reach the dulled ears of those under the deck—even if there were still ears that could hear at all.

With huge pain and difficulty he reached down one hand, seizing the pole of the boathook, and jabbed it butt-end foremost under the deck. Jab. Jab. Jab. Jab!

A moan rewarded him. Paton—little Paton—crawled forth into the light, received a douche of icy water in his face from the open cockpit, gasped, knelt up, stared down stupidly at the rigidly contorted figure on the grating. Slowly then he turned, went back on hands and knees, round the stove (cold now as the jettisoned body of its inventor), and shook man after stilly-bundled man as he went.

In a minute or two he was back again, with Rundle and Dr. Hay, to work clumsily about the body of their leader. And after a while the body moved, and groaned, and opened its eyes—looking up—to see if any one still steered them.

"Good old Skipper," whispered Dane. "Too tough to die. Pair of tough old birds. No good for killing. . . . Anything—in sight —ahead?"

And Rattray was smiling under his mustache, smiling as he had smiled once before, an age of ages ago, on the poop of the long-dead *Springbok*—smiling down at his friend.

He nodded, coughed, mouthing a little to form the word; then shot it out, in one great spasm of effort, astonishingly loud and clear.

"Ship!"

A SHIP! Here?

Helped by the others, with terrible grim slowness, Dane hauled himself up beside Rattray; watched, waiting, his chin on his quivering hands, crouched against the coaming.

The cutter was down in the trough now, buffeted by the cross-seas, and one foaming valley was their world. Then she was rising, higher, higher, up to the liquid mountain-top which had overtaken her, up where the gale blew white and stinging. And then Dane also was nodding, and smiling like a death's-head, his ravaged skin drawn tight over his cheekbones in that smile.

"Ship all right!" he croaked.

Slowly he turned, looking towards the other boats. Pearson too had seen, was pointing ahead.

As he watched, Whitehead straightened, looked, and waited as he himself had waited (for they were down in the trough again). Then, as they rose to the racing clouds, all three were pointing, open-mouthed, trying to shout. . . .

Ship! A ship ahead!

The whisper when from mouth to ear, mouth to ear among the listless, shuddering bodies in the blankets. They sat up one by one, gazed at each other dreamlike, whispering the word again, tried to crawl aft to the dripping gray shaft of light—whence had come this miracle-word to galvanize them all to life and hope again.

"Nearly on the bow," grated Dane. "Sail round into her lee. She's broadside to us —must have seen us, waiting for us, turned to give us her lee. . . . For God's sake get some life into the fellows. They'll never pick us up if we can't help ourselves a bit, from our end. . . ."

Hay was nodding now, nodded and disappeared in the dark under the deck. And it was a long time, as they measured it, before he came back—tightly holding a flat bottle in his hand.

"Show the others!" he said, holding it up. "Show them! They've one each. I whacked it out when we left the pack."

Brandy. The last of the brandy. It *might* serve—for a few minutes.

Hay held the bottle high; and Dane gestured clumsily at it with his half-paralyzed arm. (The rubbing had only partly restored his circulation.) Pearson waved; Whitehead waved: they understood.

There was about one-third of a mug of weak liquor for each of them. They still had a little water in their breakers. In the cutter, fourteen half-dead men drank—and felt warmth again in their veins. Whitehead's ten each watched a little color come back into the others' grey cheeks; Pearson laughed as his eight drank and smiled and nodded and told each other it was good. But Rattray, at the cutter's helm, looked out ahead with falling jaw.

"She's derelict!" he groaned. "Derelict, oh, my God! Beam-on and wallowing. . . . I *knew it!"*

"Derelict?" gasped Dane. "What did you know?"

Rattray did not answer him. Instead he muttered:

"In the trough. Swept. Down by the stern. Half on her side. How—how are we to get aboard . . . her . . . no one on deck to chuck us a line, even?"

"Heeling away from us—to loo'ard?" said Dane.

"Aye. Saw half her bilge. All weedy."

"Then—we'll sail round into her lee, just the same. Decks'll be lower the other side of her. May be low enough for us to get aboard—somehow—if we're quick. Think, man—*think!"*

They had to save *themselves*—and quickly. There could only be this one slender chance. If they failed to seize it, if they bungled it, they were done for.

But *how* board that derelict, in this awful sea, without a soul on the decks even to give them a rope?

Dane's mind was drugged, bemused—he could not make it act. Small wonder. He had been at the helm all night—and Heaven's pitiful angels alone knew how long before then.

"She's drifting sideways, with wind and sea—away from us as we are now," muttered Rattray, clenching his fist on the tiller in an agony of concentration, grappling his wandering mind to this one problem, urgent, vital; feeling within the crevices of his head for the stored sea-lore that alone could save them all. "Sideways —to leeward. Making a wake sideways, between her and us. That'll flatten the sea this side a bit. Always does. Then it passes under her. With her own lee on the other side to help, it'll be flattened still more. . . . That's why—a ship hove-to—in the trough—with engines stopped—rides out anything. *Now.* . . . Wake's out to windward, 'cos she's drifting to *lee*ward. Ease the sea before it gets to her. And *she'll* ease it *after,* with her own lee, like a breakwater. Yes. . . ."

He was merely repeating himself. If only he could *think.* Physically he was stronger now; he could stand more firmly on his feet. . . .

They were all stronger—but all knew that it was but the last reserve of their vitality, whipped up by the brandy. Very soon it would be gone. Somehow they must board that ship while it lasted. Perhaps there would be food—and a galley. Ye gods—hot food! *Life!* But they had to get aboard first.

Up on to that reeling, rusty giant, half-whelmed in these seas. . . .

"If we sail round in to her lee she'll shelter us from the wind. So we'll be becalmed. But she'll still be drifting," said Dane.

"She'll drift *on* to us, then," gritted Rattray. "Could we jump—before she rides us down? Her deck won't be high, that side. . . .

"Might. There's no *other* way. . . . Yes. *We'll* do that—and if we *do* get aboard—we can help the others. Give 'em a rope from her stern. . . . Feel the smooth of her wake already. . . ? There she is. Hell! *She's on the next wave now!* Not much time. After well-deck's the place. Go round her stern!"

THE derelict was in plain sight now, reeling down the reverse-slope of the sea ahead of them, the sea that had just passed under their own boats; reeling apparently towards them as they sailed down-wind to her; huge above them, rusty, her up-tilted underside all weed-cloaked and streaming, her squat funnel and masts foreshortened as they leaned away, to leeward.

The cutter shot past her low-squatting stern; both heaved up together on the next oncoming crest, fell together into the calmer trough; and now the boat was in the derelict's lee and turning up towards the break of her poop, where the low well-deck began, its bulwarks not a yard above the water.

Rattray's hand clenched convulsively on the tiller. The moment was on him.

Could they do it?

Could they jump, in time, when that steel side crashed against the cutter's flank?

The whole crew stood waiting, clinging to the frayed deck-lines, swaying, watching, horrified, desperately frightened as the enormous bulk drove at them—but with their teeth locked in a determination yet more desperate.

Rattray prayed swiftly, wordlessly, as never in his life had he prayed before.

And his prayer was answered.

The ship heeled over towards the boat in the first of the next wave's scending lurch, heeled and seemed to *leap* on them.

But as she heeled the bulwarks of the well-deck dipped below the sea, *dipped right under the cutter,* so that she floated on board over them, and grounded with a hollow *clang* on the steel of the deck. She rolled over then, sliding back towards the bulwarks, half buried as the deck came up again and the water that had gulped in roared out once more through the scuppers and over the rusted rail.

The cutter struck those bulwarks with a crash that burst in her whole side.

But her work was done. She had brought her men to safety.

"Jump for it!" yelled Rattray. "Up on the poop! Bring the long painter—halliards—any rope. We've got to help the others now!"

A mircle it had been!

As they dragged themselves up the steel ladder to the tilted poop-deck men swore and shouted huskily in the reaction of that unbelievable miracle. Ropes were made fast and flung; hauled back and flung again.

Pearson's whaler was made fast, then Whitehead's; held by the ropes from the stern-fair-leads on the ships, and held off in safety from her by the wind-force. She could not drift down on *them.* Miracle did not happen twice and they dare not risk with the whalers the chance that Rattray had taken with the cutter. So another rope from the cutter was fastened to the emptied water-cask, its other end to the ship's bollards, and the cask flung overside.

Pearson got it with his boat-hook, took the rope's end, whipped it about the nearest of his men, waved his arm. The cutter's crew hauled, staggering, slipping on the slanted poop; hauled the man along and up and in.

So, quickly, ere the waning, false strength of the brandy should leave them altogether, and with more ropes in play, they dragged their fellows on the derelict, Pearson and Whitehead last.

Thirty-two of them, dripping, clinging on the derelict's poop, very near spent now, and the sanctuary of the midships superstructure still to make.

They made it, the stronger helping the weaker, on hands and knees, along the hove-up starboard side of her paintless, rust-pitted well-deck, crawling slowly and ever more slowly up the rickety starboard ladder to the alleyway beneath the boat-deck.

And thirty-two from forty-one left nine—one of them beneath an Antarctic snowbank; two under a cross-marked cairn of a drifting floe; two on the sea-bottom; the other four lying dead in their blankets in the whalers, now vanishing down-wind in the spray and dimness of the gale. The ropes that had held them had snapped.

A FEW hours later the thirty-two men lay, huddled together, in the officers' saloon of the derelict—the derelict which had wallowed here along these headlong gray immensities, and waited (how long?) for them to come to her, and give her life again.

The men lay as they had collapsed, rolling slackly against each other on the slippery green-slimed cork linoleum, half-naked, with streams of water dribbling from their soaked rags. The liquor had burned right out of them; burned-out also was that last reserve of fighting manhood which had brought them here. Only a feeble pulsing, a faint rise and fall of slow breathing, told now of the life that still lingered in them.

And that was ebbing fast. The very alcohol which had whipped them to action was killing them now. It had driven their blood to a brief vigor, set it pumping again in the arteries and capillaries—pumping to the surface—where now it trickled, sluggish and yet more sluggish, congealing, chilled by the cold of the air and their wet garments.

They were dying; as surely dying as if they had never seen this ship; and in their stupor they did not know it. With one exception!

Meldrum, the young doctor, lay as bodily inert as the rest, but his brain still fluttered feebly. *He* knew he was dying, and why; knew that they must all die unless something was done. He lay there as one gripped in nightmare, fighting unavailingly to rouse himself.

With an enormous effort he got his eyes open, looked upon the huddled heaps of flesh that lay around him—and his brain swirled in seething protest. His face twisted slowly into a snarling grin; inch by inch he moved one arm, bent it up and got the forearm hooked about a chair-back. (They were all swivel chairs, bolted to the deck around the fixed mess-table.) Then one knee rose, in a series of galvanized jerks, till he got his foot against a table-leg. The other foot was jammed under Tarrant's body.

Now!

His jaw-muscles sprang out, rigidly knotted; his arm tightened; he kicked and pressed with his legs.

He sat up.

His trunk swayed forward, bumped against the three-legged swivel of the chair. He rested like that for perhaps a minute, breathing very heavily, his sight dim and wavering, all his senses swimming.

"Doctor's job!" he rasped through his locked teeth. "Come *on,* damn you!"

He let go of the chair and half-collapsed on his side; struggled, kicking and scrabbling for purchase with nerveless, insensible fingers; managed to get his own terrible weight balanced on elbows and knees.

After that it was a little easier. He had made his body obey, and now it was beginning to work again. Its own strength might be gone; but a strength of the spirit had come to take its place, drawn from the subconscious deeps by the knowledge of the work it must do. A doctor's job. *His* job. These breathing corpses were waiting for him. He must not leave them waiting too long.

The first man he reached *had* waited too long, had ceased to breathe—Morris, the "shore-party" steward. He left him and shambled to the next. It was Pearson, his lips puffed out and pale, with the teeth clenched under them, the air sighing very gently in and out between. Painfully, bit by bit, Meldrum tore the wet rags from the body, and began to pound and rub.

"Pearson!" he sobbed, over and over again. "Wake *up,* Pearson! I want you—want you to *help*—with the others. Oh, God, wake Pearson up! I can't. *I can't. . . .*"

But at least the blood was moving and warming again in his own veins, set going by his efforts to save another. And at last, as he rubbed and kneaded and cried, the ex-whaler stirred and moaned.

"Thank *you!*" whispered Meldrum. "Come on, Pearson! Turn *out!* Up with you! Job to do. . . ! *Hell,* how can I make him understand? *Hey! There* she blows!"

At the old whaling cry the second officer opened his eyes and tried to struggle up, sank back, and tried again with the help of Meldrum's weakly tugging arms. He blinked stupidly, began to shiver, cursing in a grisly, teeth-chattering whisper.

"Up, man! Help—or they'll all die! Like *this!*"

The doctor began to work on Tarrant. Pearson groaned, nodded, tried to still his quivering jaws.

"Find Hay!" ordered Meldrum. "Make him help. Get their clothes off. *Rub,* man!"

So two men faced and fought off from their fellows the death that had already crept upon them, there in that place of dank and dripping chill.

Soon there were three who fought; and then four, and five, lurching and shuffling and working among the quiet forms of the rest.

Meldrum pulled himself weakly to his feet for a further effort, meaning to seek for food and warmth and clothing to aid in the battle.

A closed serving-hatch in the for'ard wall of the saloon caught his eye. Dimly he reasoned out its purpose, its message for him now. He dragged himself along by the table, towards the door; let go and staggered across to it; caught the lintels, swung himself through and went blundering forward along the wet alleyway to the next. It was closed. He wrenched at the handle, pressed unavailingly against the resisting wood. The door was jammed. He drew back and let himself fall against it.

It opened and he fell through—into the steward's pantry, as he had guessed from that hatch. In the dim light from the one closed scuttle he saw an open locker-cup-board. There were tins it it; tins of condensed milk and other things; and boxes of matches—*dry*. Everything was dry in here, because the door and scuttle had been shut.

He remembered that there was a stove in the officers' saloon. Fuel! A case in the corner, half opened. Hams packed in salt, with one missing. He gathered up the broken bits of the lid, managed to tear away the rest of it, got the case on to its side and scrabbled the contents out into a heap on the deck. He put the broken wood back into the empty box, and paused. Paper! Back to the locker again—hurrah! A crumped *Antal Advertiser*, all yellow and torn. He thrust it also into the case, then began to drag the thing out, and along the alley way again.

Two minutes later he was on his knees in front of the saloon-stove. In another minute the paper smoked and flared, the wood caught and began to crackle, with blue-yellow salt-flames and much fizzing; and a puff of mephitic smoke blew out in his face.

"Drag 'em here" he cried hoarsely over his shoulder. "Work on 'em here! Cover 'em up! Table-cloth! Blankets—other cabins! Keep this fire going! Break up this wood! I'm going for food."

"Good *man!*" croaked a voice—Hay's voice—and Meldrum heard it with a great reaction of thankfulness and relief. If Hay was alive and working, then perhaps . . . perhaps *he* could *rest* now. . . .

"Next door!" he gasped. "Steward's pantry next door—*that* way. Grub in there. . . . I don't think . . . I can do . . . any more."

Doctor Meldrum relaxed and settled down quietly on the deck. . . .

JOHN DANE felt something warm touch his mouth, and moved his head away a little, very wearily. He knew that he was dreaming. He must be dreaming. It was only another cruel, tantalizing trick of imagination. There was no such thing as warmth. . . .

"Come on, Ou Baas—*tea!*" said a voice, very small and far away; and he felt his head lifted. The thing touched his lips again, and a little hot liquid spilled in between. Instinctively he swallowed, then slowly moved his tongue about his mouth, licking up every drop that remained. Tea it was. *Sweet* and *hot* and *strong*. Unbelievable.

He opened his eyes. Pearson knelt over him, was grinning down at him—a new and incredible Pearson; an impossible Pearson, because he had no hair on his face, and a clean skin, and he was in a blue cloth uniform. He had one arm under Dane's head, and Dane could feel the gold-braid on the sleeve scratching his neck; and the other hand held a cup that steamed.

"Thought you were never coming round," said Pearson. "You've been out for the last twenty hours. Have some more of this."

Dane tried to lift his head to that miracle-cup, reached it with the help of the arm under him, and drank deeply.

"Lord! That's *good!*" he muttered; and half sat up, staring about him.

"But this," he began weakly, "this is absurd. How did we get here? And—look here, am I really awake? Is that a *stove* —a *pukka* stove—*burning?*"

"It is, Ou Baas! You're a board the *Langford Hall*—Ellerman liner—cargo, motor driven. About four thousand tons, I'd say. Seems to be half full o' water, but still bearing up very nicely—considering she's been. . ."

Pearson paused. He had been about to say "derelict." But a ship was only derelict if her crew had left her.

And the crew of this ship had *not* left her! They were, some of them, still on board.

Pearson remembered the weak state of his leader, and resumed:

"Considering she's been drifting about for God knows how long. Don't you remember?"

"I'm beginning to. Did we all get aboard, then?" asked Dane with sudden anxiety.

"We did. And dossed down here in the saloon. You can thank Meldrum we aren't all dossing still—for a full due. Don't know about the others, but he rubbed half the skin off *me*. Then he found grub, and got the stove started, and—well, here we are, Ou Baas, sitting up and taking nourishment. . . . Like some ham for breakfast?"

"Ham?"

"Can't have much, the old Doc says. Not at first. Bad for the guts. And as soon as you feel like turning out, there's plenty of gear to choose from in the way of togs. We've fished out everything in that line that we could find in the cabins. Could have put you in one of the cabins, only there's the stove here, so we thought. . . . Anyway, I'll go and tell 'em you're awake."

Dane stared about him again. There were only two others in the saloon; and they lay on mattresses on the floor, under blankets. Their faces were turned from his, but their coverings moved with their breathing. For a moment he had thought that they were dead, and the shock had been heart-chilling. He had lost men enough . . . good chaps . . . not his fault . . . they would *all* have died if they had stayed at Mills Bay . . . but it was horrible to have lost any at all. But surely there would be no more deaths now? They were safe, they *must* be safe. In his still only half-awakened mind, Pearson's clean face and uniform were proof of their safety, proof that they were back at last in the world. He could not know, as yet, how far from the world they lay, even now, in this half-wrecked ship that drifted, beam-on and waterlogged, in these enormous green-gray seas, down here on the fringe of the southern ice.

He did not know of the dead who had been left in the whalers, to drift away; or of those who had died here in this saloon—those whom this ship had succored too late. He did not realize how narrowly he himself had missed the sweep of Death's scythe, how utterly he had spent himself, at the helm of the cutter, while his men sheltered below in the last stupor of hopelessness and famine. . . .

Dr. Hay came in, with Rattray at his heels—and these also were shaved and clean, and dressed in good clothes. Only their starvation-bright eyes, looking down at him from their hardship-ravaged faces, and a certain deliberation of weakness in their movements, remained to tell of the ordeals they had endured.

"Pair of tough old birds!" quoted Hay, as Dane's hand went out to meet his captain's.

"How's the ship?" asked Dane. "Will she float?"

"The ship's all right," answered Rattray. But his tone held a faint constraint, a slight emphasis on the word "ship," implying that there might be other things that were not "all right." Had Dane been in his proper, keenly vigorous senses he would have felt that constraint, and enquired its meaning.

"It's only the engine-room," went on Rattray, "that's holding her down. Luckily its port door was shut or she'd have sunk long ago. The weather door and skylights were open, though, and the water's slopped in feet deep. Tyson's working on the donkey-pump—now, with Murray and Streator to give him a hand. It's a diesel-pump, and pretty badly seized with rust and stuff, besides being all gummed up with old oil. But luckily it's high up in the ship, same as the old steam donkey-boilers always were, and above water, so—well, Tyson reckons he ought to have her going by tomorrow and we'll kick the water out. Then we can start on the main-engines."

"Oh, that's fine! Look here, Doc, I want to turn out and start seeing about things. Are you going to let me up?"

"We'll see after you've got some grub inside you," answered Hay noncomittally. "Your breakfast'll be here in a moment. . . . But first I think a wash and some clothes'd do you a bit of good, wouldn't they?"

"Gad! A *wash!*" echoed Dane. "This is luxury! And decent togs again!"

"Here you are—take your pick." Rattray pointed to a pile of clothing on one end of the long table; Harmer, the remaining steward, came in with soap and towel and a tin basin with cold water in it, adding hot from the kettle on the stove.

In twenty minutes Dane was dressed—in a suit of shore-going gray flannel, with a watch-coat a-top for warmth.

"Ready for breakfast now, Ou Baas?" asked Harmer.

"Rather! Did somebody say there was *ham?*"

"Sorry there's no eggs, or bread. But would ham and biscuits and tea—"

"Would they? Fetch 'em along, and we'll *see!*"

He was feeling better and stronger every moment now. In addition to a physical comfort of cleanliness that he had not known for a year, the awful strain of anxious responsibility under which he had so long been living was lifting now; and these things have a great reaction on the body. They were aboard a ship, safe out of those cockleshell boats at last; aboard a ship miraculously placed in their helpless path, just when that path was ending in death; and his engineers were already working to make her seaworthy again. A few weeks at most, now, and they would be back in civilization once more—the civilization that had so horribly and unaccountably left them in the lurch.

A shadow came on his brow at that thought, but with an effort he threw off the depression that had come with it.

And then Harmer brought the food, and in the physical joy of that he forgot all speculation.

RATTRAY and Hay had sat down at the other end of the table and were talking quietly together, with occasional veiled glances at their leader.

"He's had a ghastly time. Far worse than any of us," the captain was saying. "We've simply no conception of what he's been through. Lord knows how long he was at the helm before *I* woke up. . . . I'll never forgive myself for that," he interjected, his voice breaking. And then: "D'you think it's safe for him to—see, yet? D'you think it's safe for him—to see at all? After all, we can tell him about it later."

"He seems all right now," answered Hay. "But it *might* be too much of a shock. . . ."

"The only thing is," Rattray added; "if we leave everything as it is and let him see, he *might* notice something that we've missed—something that would make everything clear. And—well, it might—just possibly—be pretty important for us to *have* everything clear—before we make the land."

"Lord, yes. . . . They might think *we* did it, somehow. . . ."

"I didn't mean *that,* quite."

"Well, never mind what you meant. I'm thinking of *him.* On the whole, I think he'd better see. If not, he's sure to notice that something's being kept from him, and that would probably make him worry all the more. . . . Yes. You tell him, Skipper."

Rattray rose hesitantly and came back to Dane, balancing himself against the listing ship's drunken motion with a hand along the table-edge, as though it were a rail.

Dane had almost emptied his plate. (Hay was allowing very little food at a time in the long-atrophied stomachs of any of them.) He looked up as his friend sat down opposite, and grinned.

"I could eat a horse," he said with his mouth full. "Is this all I'm going to get? Damn you, Doc, I'm *hungry!"* he called to Hay, who was bending now over one of the recumbent figures beside the stove.

Then he looked up, and saw what the doctor was doing, and looked ashamed. Here he was complaining about being hungry, while those two chaps—

"You can have another feed in a couple of hours, Ou Baas," was the preoccupied reply. "Ha! Here's Meldrum coming to, now, thank God. . . . I thought he was going to be a goner. . . . Stand by with that tea, Harmer."

"Meldrum better?" cried Dane. "Oh, *fine!* Who—who's the other—and what—"

"Hamilton. Pretty bad. But I think we should pull him through all right, now. Don't worry, Ou Baas. We're through the worst now," he insisted. "And the Skipper wants you on deck."

"Ready?" asked Rattray. "There's a few things you ought to see—before we clear 'em away. Queer things. This ship isn't—quite—an ordinary derelict. She wasn't the sort of ship that would be abandoned, anyway.

"So far as we could see, there couldn't have been any *reason* for abandoning her. It was a bit puzzling to see how she got here at all."

Dane seized on the last point. He had not grasped the import of the others yet.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "We're not so very far south of the Cape-Australian route, and—"

"But she wasn't *on* the Cape-Australian route! She was Durban for Bombay, with Natal sugar!"

"Great *Scott!"*

"Four days out of Durban, according to the deck-log in the charthouse."

"But—"

"She must have been adrift ever since—*over a year,* by the dates—don't you remember the weed on her? The only way *I* can account for it is the Mozambique Current. It would drift her all down the south coast of Africa to Agulhas, and after that she'd be taken south into the Westerlies here and drift eastwards with 'em. There must have been a bit more north in the Westerlies than usual, to drift her down here, but it's the only way to account for her *being* here.

The Mozambique Current part of it's certain, anyway. She was only four days out of Durban when it happened, so she'd be right in the stream of—"

"When *what* happened?"

"That's just what we don't *know.* There isn't a word in the log about *anything* to account for it. It just breaks off in the middle, that's all."

"Good Lord!"

"But there's more than that. A lot more. Her boats are still in the davits—what's left of them. (One or two seem all right still.) But it's the other things. . . . If you're fit, I wish you'd come up and have a look. It's more than *we* can make out."

Dane got up, refusing help. "I'm all right now," he said. "But *what's* this? Other things?"

"Yes, other things," repeated Rattray grimly, as they left the saloon. They went for'ard along the cabin alleyway to the boat-deck ladder. "We wanted you to see, before we. . . . Well, they aren't the sort of things to leave about for long. Most of 'em must have been washed overboard long ago, I expect—most of 'em would be on deck—though there'll be some in the foc's'le, I'm afraid—we haven't been there yet— and in the engine-room, under all that water. . . . We found two in the cabins, but it's the other four. . . . We've left 'em just as we found 'em, so that you—"

"What? *Bodies?*"

Rattray nodded. They were climbing the ladder now, up to the open; and the roar of wind and sea waxed loud again in their ears, mingled with the lashing rafales of spray that came over. They reached out on to the wet, green-slimed planking, and Rattray pointed to the foot of the bridge-ladder.

"There's the first," he said.

Tangled in the lower rungs was a skeleton, long since picked clean by sea-birds, but still partly covered with the decaying rags of what had apparently been a white uniform, for one shoulder-strap was still visible, with the blackened gold rank-marks of Master upon it. One fleshless hand still gripped the ladder-rail—as if the captain of the *Langford Hall* had been struck down in the very act of setting foot on the bottom step. But there was no sign of any blow upon the skull—where a few wisps of gray hair still remained.

"He was trying to reach the bridge," said Rattray simply, in a solemn voice; for here was all that remained of a brother of the cloth, and his inarticulate soul was filled with a sad pride.

"Now—come up," he urged.

THEY climbed, very silent, and helping each other, for neither had gained much strength as yet from the rest and food and warmth; and the ship was wallowing heavily in the great seas.

There were two bridges, a lower and an upper structure, the former having the wheelhouse in its center, with the wireless-room built on behind.

"The operator's still in there," said Rattray. "He's sitting with the phones on his head. You can see him through the window. It's open."

"It looks—almost—as if there'd been—a mutiny of some sort," said Dane haltingly.

"If there was, where did the mutineers go? The boats are still here."

"Another ship took 'em off perhaps—to their punishment. God, I hope—"

"Then why wasn't *this* ship brought in? There wasn't anything *wrong* with her, and a prizecrew . . . but wait till you've seen it all. Look in here."

The doors and windows of the wheelhouse stood also open to the wind and weather, as they might have been opened for a hot day in the tropics. And at the foot of the wheel was another skeleton, in what was left of a seaman's uniform.

"You see?" said the captain. "He hadn't even left the wheel. . . . Now come up to the chart-room and look at the deck-log."

The chartroom was above the wheelhouse, on the upper bridge; and they reached it by an internal ladder and hatch. The log lay open on the ledge table, its leaves much crumpled by wind and stained by spray and rain—but the entries on the last used page were still for the most part readable. They were headed "M. v. Langford Hall, Port Natal, for Bombay;" *and the date was the ninth of March, of the year before!* The entries were just the normal ones of a ship at sea, making her uneventful passage across the Indian Ocean. They broke off at nine a. m., with details of course and distance run. In the "remarks" column was written: "Hands employed chipping waterways."

So the log held no clue to the disaster which had overtaken this ship and her men—except to testify to its awful suddenness.

"Now—look outside," prompted Rattray. "Look *there!*"

Jammed between the canvassed rail of the upper bridge and the stand of the engine-room telegraph (which still stood at "Full Ahead") lay the fourth skeleton, face downwards, stretched out flat, one arm thrust out and pointing to starboard along the planking—*and its bony fist was tightly clenched.*

"The ventilators are all turned to starboard," said Rattray slowly, "to catch the wind that must have been blowing then—whatever there was of it. And *he* was looking the same way. The officer-of-the-watch. . . . Something came down on them from windward, Jack—and he shook his fist at it and died. They all died together. Because of something that was to windward. . . ."

"It—looks more like—piracy—than mutiny," muttered Dane. "She might have had gold aboard. . . . They're always importing gold into India—to be hoarded—and they might have been carrying some. From the Rand mines, via Durban. And another ship, coming up on the starb'd side. . . ."

"*Might* have been that. But *was* it? . . . I don't know. . . . It doesn't seem . . . I . . . don't . . . know!"

They looked at each other, up here on

this silent bridge of long-past tragedy; and both felt an echoing quiver of the grim ghastliness of it, as if the very planking they stood upon had absorbed some record of the thing—to give it forth again now, at last, to these the first men to whom it could whisper its tale.

But what *had* happened? How had it been done—and *why?* What swiftly awful thing had killed these men: the steersman at the wheel, the wireless-operator at his phones, the watch-officer here—and the captain, striving to reach his post of command even as he died?

The two men stared into each other's eyes. Dane's voice was slow and dragging.

"Rattray, you said you knew."

"And now," whispered Rattray, "I can't *think.*"

CHAPTER SIX

THE DARKENED LAND

THE *Langford Hall* rose on the seas a little less sluggishly now. From within her came the thump of the donkey-pump, thrilling her whole hull with its slight tremor, as of a body that revives.

Tyson, the *Springbok's* second engineer, with the two men left out of his staff, had had to strip down the machine almost completely to clean and overhaul its long disused parts, and the job had taken them a day and a night and the whole of the following morning, working ceaselessly in watches. But now it was running, thrusting out again from the dripping engine-room the brine that had so long washed and slumped back and forth down there, black and greasy, between the great cylinders of her cold and rusted main engines.

The *Langford Hall* was coming to life like a bather hauled limp from the breakers, but after they had squeezed the sea from her waterlogged lungs there would still be much to do before her true life could return. There was the great heart of her itself to be set beating again—those main engines, still and stiff as the dead these thirteen long months. Even then her resuscitation would not be complete. There was her battery of pumps and auxiliaries for bilge and ballast-tanks and main-cooling water-circulation, to say nothing of her dynamos for lighting and wireless and the steering-tiller-quadrant in the poop deckhouse.

All this machinery was as yet under water, with the exception of this one donkey-engine that worked now to pump her free. Her emergency batteries for lighting and wireless, though also placed high up in her, had been "shorted" and run down by damp and corrosion and long neglect—there was not a spark of life left in one of them. If they wanted electricity they would have to get a dynamo running—a dynamo soaked to its core in salt water!

Knibbs said he would do his best, but the prospect was not hopeful; and at a pinch they could do without electricity. There were oil-lamps aboard in case of failure in lighting-circuits; the lack of wireless would only delay their returning contact with the world. If need be they could couple up the steering to the low-geared hand-wheel a-top of the poop deckhouse.

The main engines themselves would be the worst and most vital job. It was impossible to say, as yet, whether the engineers had had time to stop them before the mysterious disaster that had come upon the ship had taken them also. Probably they had not: even the telegraph stood at "Full Ahead." *If* not, then the engines must have run on and on unguarded, till the lubricant in the feeds was exhausted. Then they would have heated themselves to a screaming standstill or solid seizure.

That meant jammed pistons and broken rings and scored cylinder-walls—and no moving them again till all cylinders had been dismantled and completely overhauled. (Perhaps not even then: a Diesel must have high compression; and the scoring of the cylinders might be too deep to be sealed with oil, thus letting the air compressed by each upstroke go leaking away.) There were also the bearings, big-ends and small-ends and shaft, to say nothing of the thrust-block that bore and communicated the forward push of the propeller-shaft to the frames of the ship herself.

It was a dockyard job, no less—and Tyson would have to do it *here,* in the midst of these shouting Westerlies, with their skyward-leaping seas; with only two skilled assistants, and perhaps inadequate tools as well. . . .

Bartlett, the third assistant, had been left in the second whaler, dead, along with Jacks, one of the seamen. Mills, who had shared her command with Pearson, had succumbed in that first hour on board, when Meldrum had striven to save them all—and with him had died Dr. Kildale, and the seaman Simms, and Morris. Walters, who had commanded the first whaler, commanded her still—somewhere away to leeward, stiff in her cockpit, with Ray for crew. So there were twenty-eight, now, alive out of the forty-one who had sailed from Capetown in the *Springbok*—and two of these, Hamilton and Meldrum, lay yet on the brink of death, undecided whether to go or stay, in their improvised beds on the floor of the warmed saloon. The biologist had been steadily weakening all through the boat-journey, though he had hung on to life with a grim insistence that had earned the amazed admiration of all. Now he seemed to be sinking, his fighting spirit tired of fighting. And the young doctor had not spared himself for others; and now Nature asked her price. . . .

Dane stood on the bridge, with Rattray and Ransome and Paton, all in oilskins against the rain and spray—oilskins found on board, with all the other clothing of the dead. They were talking of the huge labor that was yet to be done in the bowels of this ship ere she could come truly alive again on the sea—and take them forward on this the last stage of their long struggle, their final round against the passionless but implacable enemy that had so nearly conquered them.

The poor remains of her former crew had been buried overside that morning, with their own four, Dane reading the service from the prayer-book he had found in the captain's cabin—now his own. The sadness of that rite was still upon them, but it was revealed only in a certain quietude of the speech between them, for the words they spoke were of the present and the future. It was useless to mourn further for the dead. Still more futile was it to try and pierce the mystery which had left this ship unguided on the sea. . . .

"Tyson says there's oil enough to get us to South Africa—if he can get the engines going," Rattray was saying. "But heaven knows how long it'll be before he'll be able to tell us whether they'll go or not."

"If they won't—well, there's still Australia, downwind," Dane pointed out. "We could rig some kind of a sail, I expect. The only thing is: How long would it take us to get there under sail? She'd be pretty slow, with all the weed on her bottom, and there might not be grub to last. . . . What's the position about, Pater? Finished the inventory yet?"

"Nearly. I don't think we need worry about that, Ou Baas—at any rate, if we can get her going for Africa. We're a good deal nearer Africa than Australia, aren't we? . . . You see, she had a bigger crew than we are, and she was only four days out of Durban. All the cold storage stuff is spoilt, of course; but there's plenty of tinned and salt meat, and biscuits, and a good deal of flour in bins that isn't spoilt, and dried fruit and condensed milk and so on. And the fresh-water tanks are very nearly full, Tyson says. Pretty musty, but all right. The only real bother is the cooking. The galley's all electric, and the gear's completely ruined by salt water. The door was left open, you see, and—we found the cook in there. . . . Even if His Knibbs gets a dynamo going—which he very much doubts—I don't think—"

"Well, there's always the stove in the saloon. Thank heaven they weren't modern enough to go for an electric radiator!"

"But there's no coal aboard."

"No; they wouldn't be wanting it on the Bombay run, of course. But there's plenty of woodwork we can use. That's not our big trouble. It's the engines. We'll all have to learn to be mechanics, and give Tyson a hand. It shouldn't be hard to learn. We've been practically everything in our time, most of us, one way or another. If you've *got* to do a thing, you generally find you can. And you don't need a five years' apprenticeship, either. . . . Well, it shouldn't be long before he gets some idea of what shape they're in. He's pumping the water out fast. Feel her buoyancy coming back? And the after well-deck isn't dipping any more."

AS HE said, the *Langford Hall* was quickly getting her trim again. It was evident there could be no serious leak in her, or the effects of the pumping would have been slower. Indeed, had there been any serious leak she would long since have gone to the bottom. Rattray's early guess had been right—the water must have practically all come in from the deck, through the open starboard door and the skylights of the engine-room. There was very little in the other compartments of the ship—no more than was to be expected from mere weeping seams and rivets over the many months that she had drifted masterless.

"The navigation's still a bit of a difficulty," resumed Dane presently. "We've got tables and instruments again now, and that means a lot—but we can't do *very* much with a last year's *Nautical Almanac.* And we haven't any reliable clock-time either. I've found her chronometers and wound 'em, and they seem to be going fairly well again, but until—or unless—we can get a wireless time-signal they won't be *much* good to us. . . . Still, South Africa's a biggish mark, and so's Australia. We'll hit *some* part of the coast all right, and then carry on till we make a port. Doesn't matter which port—they'll all be about the same distance from where we are—and I'd like to go back to Capetown if we can. But I think, for safety's sake, we'd better aim for the bull on the target and have a shot at Port Elizabeth."

"*If* the engines go," said Rattray.

"Good old optimist!" commented Dane. "Well, here's Tyson now. Perhaps he's come to tell us."

The engineer came up the ladder, a soaked figure in greasy overalls, his bulldog features smeared with black oil. He looked tired, and a little disappointed.

"I've been putting the donkey-exhaust into the starting-reservoir," he reported. "Wanted to see if the main engines'd turn over on the compressed gases. I had full pressure ten minutes ago, and tried 'em, but they weren't budging, even with us heaving on the handspike-gear to help 'em. I'm afraid they're seized all right. Couldn't really have expected anything else. We'll get on with the job right away."

"Good man. Take all the help you want. We'll have nothing else to do except eat and sleep till you've *got* 'em heaving round, so carry on. We can't be moving too soon, Chief."

"Right there, Ou Baas! *I* shan't be sorry to see Table Mountain again. . . ." He grinned. "Streator says when he gets ashore he's going to get all the issues o' the *Weekend Argus* since we've been away and go and sit in one o' the Adderley Street cafés, drinking coffee and reading and looking round at the girls at the other tables, till he's read every copy through."

Ransome laughed. Men who have been as close to death as these can laugh at little enough, and with the food and warmth they had found here on board their spirits were recovering as quickly as their bodies.

"And what'll you do, Chief?" he asked, as Tyson, luxuriantly leaning on the rail, produced and lit a cigar. (He found a box of good ones in the chief engineer's cabin.)

"Oh, busman's holiday," was the answer delivered between ecstatic puffs. "I'm spending the day watching my brother overhauling locomotives at Salt River. That's his job. I'm going to lean against something, like I'm doing now, and give advice."

"Watching other people work for a change, eh? Sounds restful," commented the hydrographer.

"What are you doing, Ou Baas?" asked the engineer.

"I think I'll get a ticket for the Strangers' Gallery from my old pal the Minister of Education. Go one better than you, Chief. I'll sit back and watch other people who only *think* they're working."

"Now, now," bantered Ransome. "That's cynical."

"It's not," argued Paton, who had not lost his old feelings about politicians. "It's an understatement of fact. They don't even *think* they're working. Half of 'em go to sleep on their benches. Don't blame 'em either. . . ."

Tyson said he had better be getting back to his job. He would call for men as soon as he wanted them. He wasn't quite ready yet; had got to plan things out a bit first. They wished him luck.

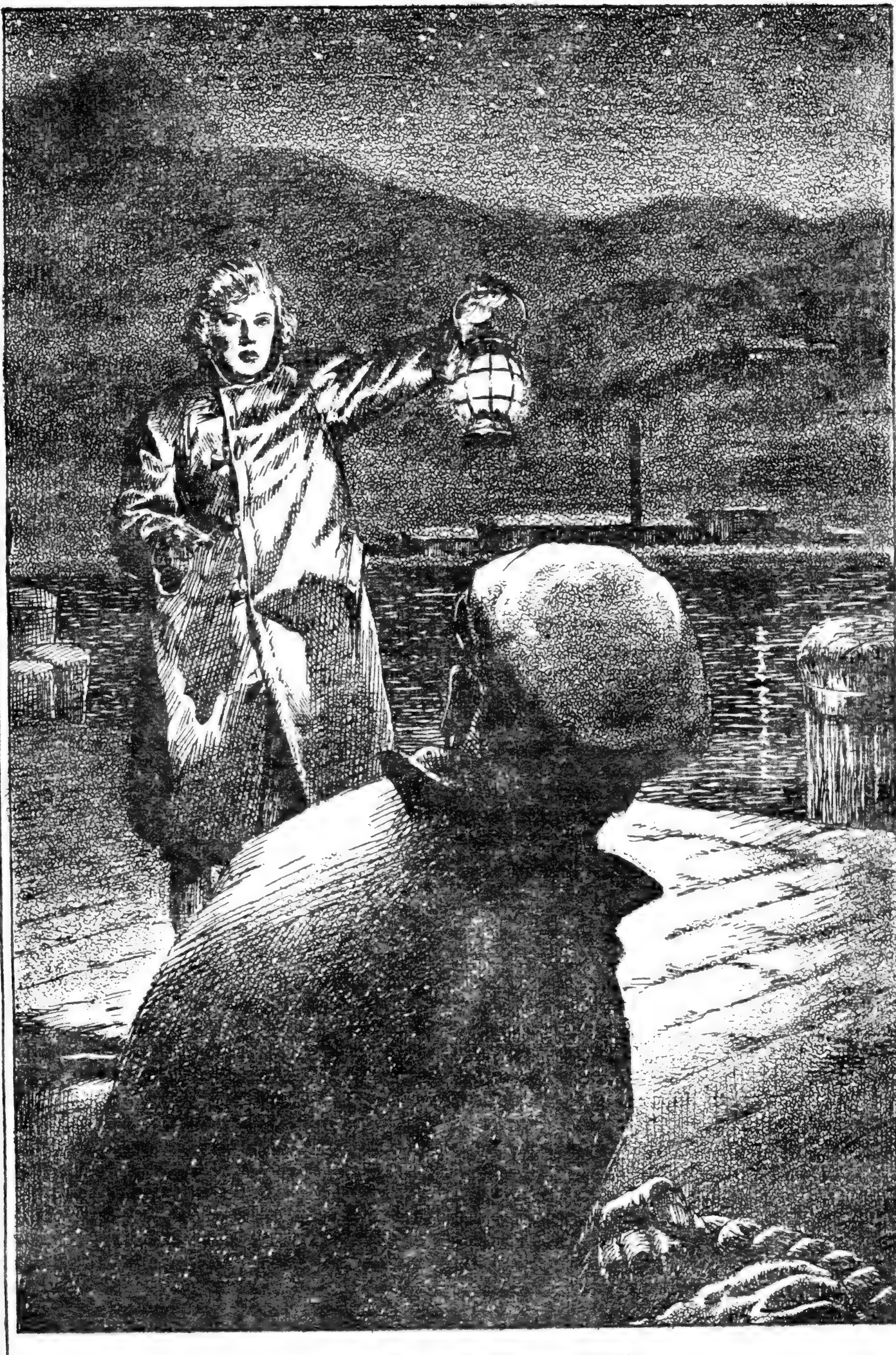
Dane went down with him. The others felt curiously at a loose end. As their leader had said, there was nothing else for them to do, till they were called on, but eat and sleep.

"Let's go," said Ransome, "and see what Trembling and Riley and Harmer are up to. I *did* hear something about a stew. Harmer's found some sacks of dried vegetables, and a bag of potatoes that doesn't seem too bad. . . ."

They left the bridge. The *Langford Hall* could look after herself. She had been doing that for more than a year, and she could go on doing it for a little longer. As Rattray had said in the boat, a modern freighter, properly loaded with her center of gravity not too low, will lie beam-on to almost any sea without taking harm—for as long as her plates will last.

But down in the engine-room a hell was opening for them all—a hell wherein they were to dwell in torture for over a month.

AS TYSON had feared, the main engines had run on by themselves till the lubricant supply had been exhausted—and then had seized solid. Every one of the six cylinders had got to come apart, and every bearing in the whole equipment also. Characteristically, the bulldog-faced engineer decided to tackle the worst job first—the cylinders. Twenty-six nuts, each tautened home with spanner and sledgehammer and since made all the faster by rust, had got to come off from every cylinder-head; then inspection and overhauling-plates had got to come off all round



"Don't one of you move!" snapped a voice.

the installation (with a mass of fuel-feed and lubricator-gear as well) that the six big-end bearings might be sledged adrift, nut by nut, from the crankshaft; then there were the small-end bearings up inside the great hollow pistons, and the heavy connecting-rods each to be lowered down safely—all this before they could attempt to move the pistons themselves.

But not a nut on any of the six big cylinder-heads would loosen, though they hammered on the lever-end of the great dismantling-spanner till they thought their brains would burst.

Tyson found a blow-lamp in the tool-store and tried the old mechanic's trick of heat; but the lamp was too small to conquer the big area of conduction and did no good. So he soused them all with oil, with the idea of leaving it to "creep" overnight through the binding rust; and put his helpers on to the big-ends. The day ended, however, before they had done more than move one inspection-plate, so fast had it rusted also.

And so, when supper was reported, they had not even gained access to the job. They came up disheartened, their long-starved and insufficiently recovered bodies wearied out; and Dane judged it best that a night's sleep should intervene before they tried again. And so Rattray set watches, lest some danger should come upon the ship while they slept unawares; and the rest lay down and forgot, for a time, the drab gray looming of the toil ahead.

But in the morning the oiled nuts were no better; and in desperation Tyson lit a wood-fire on the foremast head, and when he judged the steel to be hot enough they swept the charred ashes over on to the floor-plates far below them, coughing and choking in the bitter reek. Then the clang of the hammers stung again on their singing ears, and the poured oil sizzled and smoked and stank, and the gloomy heat of the steel beat up oppressively into their sweating faces—and the first nut gave!

They raised a hoarse cheer, and Tyson shifted spanner and hammer-men to the next, in haste lest the cooling should defeat them too soon. Others worked on the first with a lighter spanner and a smaller sledge, and an hour later it was off and the second half away. Then they had to light the fire again.

Twenty-four more nuts on that head—and five more heads waiting, in a row. Twenty-six by five made a hundred and thirty; and God knew how many more of them there were, biding their time, in the untouched work beneath. And the engine-room was full of smoke, eye-stinging and lung-searing, despite the roaring wind in the ventilators and the open skylights to lee. And the *clang, clang, clang* of the hammers beat into their brains, and those obstinate, fast-seized nuts were so many bleared, derisive eyes, staring in unwinking, sneering defiance at them from the waiting cylinder-heads.

Twenty-six by five—a hundred and thirty. Plus twenty-four here—twenty-three—twenty-two now—

Tyson would have put more men on, only there were not enough tools.

The first head *might* be ready for them to try and pry loose, for lifting with the overhead-tackle—in something under a week, if they were lucky.

But by then most of them had ceased to count the days. They had ceased to count at all. The hammer-strokes had started them counting—one-two, three-four, five-six—and "oh, for God's sake stop totting 'em up, damn you!" cried each to himself, and ground his teeth, and wept tears of maddened weakness.

Some of the nuts were so corroded that the spanners would not grip on their rounded corners, and they had to use a great pipe-wrench instead, very carefully, lest its teeth chew the steel to a circle on which nothing would grip at all. . . .

Yet they were learning a knack in it all; and on the waiting jobs the slow oil crept and soaked in, so that when they came to them they found each the easier; until, after four heads were done, they could work on the sixth with the lighter spanner from the beginning, while the heavy gang looked after number five. And on the tenth day, by Dane's tally, all six heads were loose; and they began to lift them with the Weston chain-purchase.

They did not lift easily. They were rusted and glued all round the edges. One pried them all round, bit by bit, with hammer and cold chisel—the latter held in tongs to save the already burned and battered hands of the holder. And therefore, at every fourth or fifth blow, the chisel rattled clear and fell, and had to be passed up again—till some genius made it fast to the tongs with a lanyard.

Three more days saw the end of that nightmare; and Tyson poured more oil into the gaping cylinder-tops and called his gang down to the next Circle of Inferno—the big-ends again.

They worked now in a sullen stupor, as if hypnotized by the grimly silent thing that their puny hands attacked. Their eyes lost their human look, and their mouths hung slackly as they tottered back and forth, up the ladders to food and rest and down again to another stretch of hell. And they worked on reduced rations, for Paton was afraid for the stores now, not having thought at first that the work would take so long. . . .

Meanwhile the ship drifted. Perhaps at the rate of half a knot. Twelve sea-miles in a day, westwards and apparently a little south.

On the fifteenth day they saw ice to the southwest—a sight they had thought to have done with, a danger they had hoped to have escaped. And this was not the *Springbok,* built for safety in ice. She was a shell of thin steel plating, with no resistance to ice even had she been new and freshly-painted—and this plating was deep-pitted and corroded, with rusted rivets that would snap like carrots at any solid impact.

They must keep clear of ice at all costs. But how?

The ship must be given steerageway. That meant a sail—and *that* meant increasing her rate of drift. Already she had drifted nearly two hundred miles—so much farther from South Africa, which was their only hope now, for their remaining food would not last to Australia even if they got power on the engines the very next day. And they were far from getting power on the engines.

"Have the sail ready for hoisting on the forem'st," said Dane. "The spare well-deck awning that Jeans found'll do. Get him to adapt it a bit, Skipper. And don't hoist till there's real danger. Is the hand-steering free yet?"

"Pearson's been working on it," explained Rattray. "The wheel heaves round now if you get two men on it. Takes minutes to put it hard over, though. But perhaps it'll ease up a bit more with use."

Four weeks from the day they had sighted her, Dane stood beside the dismantled main engines, with a hand on Tyson's shoulder, and gave orders for a day's rest. Like so many moving corpses the men turned and went silently, slowly, up the ladders. To-morrow—they would have to start assembling these engines again. But for this day they would sleep—if they could. Some of them could not, for the hammers rang yet in their brains.

And even now Tyson could not swear that the engines would go.

One cheering ray, one omen of better fortune, was given them. Meldrum had recovered, was getting his squandered strength back again; and Hamilton had begun to fight once more for his life—and was slowly winning.

"Please God we've had the last death now," said Dane, when Hay told him. "Please God we'll pull through now. I think we should—if Tyson can fix the engines. It's out of our hands. We can only do our best."

"It's been out of our hands all along," replied Dr. Hay very quietly; "and the best's all any one can do. But—I believe—it *counts*. . . . I believe this ship—"

"Was sent to us," finished Dane for him. "So do I. So does the Skipper. Though it seems—"

"I know. Why did the other poor chaps have to die, so that she could drift down to *us?* It *doesn't* seem right—"

"I don't know. . . . If it's all a fight between Good and Evil, perhaps Good turns Evil to its own ends sometimes. . . . But *why?* Why should *we* count?"

"God knows. But—it somehow looks as if we *do*. As if we're—wanted—for something."

Strange thoughts come to men who have looked at Death—and fought him off from them—in the wild places of the earth. Thoughts which they do not readily voice, even to each other. But—they know they are true thoughts, with a knowledge that nothing can dispute. . . .

LATE autumn found them in a gentle calm.

May and the early part of June are the months of good weather in the seas that border southwestern Africa. The season was lasting a little late this year: although it was now nearly mid-June there was still no sign of its breaking. Overhead, now, was blue and cloudless; underfoot, a ship that shook with dire vibrations to the grunt and hiss and slam of her scored and leaking diesel-cylinders, the jerking clatter of loose-worn crank-shaft, the shiver of an untrue propeller-drive. She made a little less than five knots; and the wake behind her was all a-boil with the enormous drag of her weedgrown bottom; and from her rust-brown flank shot urgent water streams from full-bore pumps, fighting for the mastery with the ever-growing leaks of her rottenness.

Twenty scarecrows stood on the boat-deck, staring ahead with eyes long used to the bitterness of hope continually deferred; three looked out from the bridge, a short and thickset but almost fleshless figure in the center. Two more drooped there at the hand-wheel aft, on the poop. The other three were below, in the engine-room, nursing their desperately-thumping charges with not a moment to spare for wondering what—if anything—the rest could see now from the deck.

"Nip up to the lookout, Pearson," said Dane—and had an odd sense of familiarity at the order. Surely he had given it once before, under circumstances strangely similar? "You *might* see something ahead. . . . About a day and a half of fuel left," he added, turning to Rattray. "If we don't sight Africa before then. . . . We ought to have made the land four days ago, by my reckoning."

"It's not being sure of our longitude," answered the old captain (his hair was nearly white now). "Shall I try a sounding?"

"Can if you like. But all the south east's steep-to, except for Agulhas Bank, and a sounding won't tell us much. No. It's not worth the bother. Either we'll make the land or we won't. Sounding won't make any difference one way or the other. See anything, Pearson?"

"There's a sort of . . . cloudbank in the north, but I don't think it's anything *but* a cloudbank."

"I'll come up."

Dane went, and stayed for an hour. The men on the boat-deck looked up at him now and then, listlessly; and some of them went below to lie down. They had been on quarter-rations now for fifteen days.

"Skipper!" hailed Dane at the end of the hour. "You can take that sounding, if you will!"

There was a little stir among the men remaining. Two of them hoisted over the deep-sea lead. It dropped with a dull splash into the dark-green shade of the ship's port side. The rope went whirling after it, out and down and astern. Without interest they watched the coils fly off. But Dane leaned down over the lookout barrel-edge, keenly alert.

The rope checked in its uncoiling, and then went more slowly. A man put his foot on it, and it broke.

"A hundred fathoms or so out!" shouted Rattray, with a new note in his voice. "That'll be only about—forty or so, up and down!"

"Thought so," Dane shouted back. "Funny I should have mentioned the Agulhas Bank. We're on it, boys! It's Cape Agulhas ahead—that's your cloudbank, Pearson! We'll head for False Bay and Simonstown, Skipper. Should just do it, with a bit over. . . . I *do* think you chaps might raise some sort of a cheer!"

It was a stupefaction of sheer gladness that had held them tongue-tied. But they cheered now as if they would make even the land hear them, and tears ran down their faces. They shook hands madly; and some danced, with clumsy abandon. Even Rattray threw his cap into the air—the best uniform-cap of the *Langford Hall's* dead captain, with its green-corroded badge and peak.

"Tell Tyson!" roared Dane; and Rattray wrenched the whistle-plug from the voice-pipe and blew a long air-blast down it, so that they all heard the joyous shrilling of the whistle down below—and Tyson's startled "Hullo!" coming up to them through the open skylight.

"Cape Agulhas ahead!" Rattray sang down. "Be entering harbor in twenty-four hours!

"But it's a funny thing," he added, as he replaced the plug in the pipe. "There ought to be trawlers out here. One o' the best grounds on the coast, this is—and not a craft in sight!"

A little later they saw sails ahead, the sails of open fishing-boats, and were reassured. And then, as the ship drew nearer, those sails came down—disappeared!—and through the glasses they presently saw that *the boats were under oars!*

The oars were being furiously plied, and heading in towards the shore. Why? Was the weather going to break? The glass was steady enough. Perhaps they were a little jumpy in those boats, deeming this weather, thus late in the season, too good to be true. Maybe they had seen some local sign of warning such as fishermen hand down from generation to generation—the unusually clear visibility of a distant mountain, or even an altered rhythm in the breathing of the sea itself, felt by that special sense of attunement which a long closeness to the sea, in open boats, can sometimes give to a man.

They were apparently making for Struis Bay, a safe landing for them, but far out of the *Langford Hall's* course for Simonstown.

THE *Langford Hall* continued steadily on her course; and night overtook her just as she came abreast of Cape Hangklip, the eastern extremity of False Bay. Here is a wide bight in the coast, south-looking, like a huge inverted "U," its western shore formed by the narrow tongue of land which is the southern part of the Cape Peninsula; and Simonstown is on that side, near the head of the bay, nestling close in under mountains high and steep.

They could not expect to make the naval base now until about midnight, for they had over twenty miles still to go. But that would hardly matter. Even though they could not announce their coming by wireless, they would be burning their oil steaming-lights; and they would be seen soon enough. And the approaches to this the headquarters of the African Station of the Royal Navy were splendidly lighted.

But surely—they ought to have sighted the powerful light on Cape Point, there on the tip of the Peninsula, by now? It was already darkling, and all lighthouses lit up at sunset.

And why were there no other ships about? Why had they seen nothing except those open fishing-boats?

Full dark, and no light *yet* from the Point. An hour passed, and they should have seen also the light on the Roman Rock, off Simon's Bay itself. But there were no lights anywhere; no ships; nothing but the sea and the stars, and the dark high land ahead.

"It *is* true," whispered Dane to the white-haired, silent old friend at his side. "*That's* why we weren't relieved. It *has* happened. What? Why? There was not a *hint* of it when we had our last messages, that morning at Mills Bay. Just the same old news, the same old conferences, and everybody talking about disarmament treaties—"

"Disarmament, hell!" grated Rattray through his teeth. "What about aircraft, subsidized *commercial* aircraft, hosts of 'em all over the place? . . . Commercial aviation! Commercial *damnation!* I knew it. Who *didn't?* Easy to find a way *round* their bloody disarmament treaties—getting slap through 'em even while they were signing 'em—and each hoping that nobody else was looking! . . . An autogiro can rise off a ship's deck, remember! *God*, yes! How d'you suppose they died aboard this ship? . . . Do you remember the skeleton shaking its fist to wind'ard—where the gas-cloud was coming from . . . dropped in a screen there to starb'd . . . and no escape! . . . Attacking the merchantmen again. Smashing us up where it hurts most—ocean trade-routes—strategic points on 'em—oh, my Lord! *What'll we find when—*"

"Wait, old man—for heaven's sake, wait—till we do get there—to Simonstown! It *can't* be true. It *must* be something else. I can't believe *this*. They wouldn't be so mad, so damnably *mad!* What was there to fight about? That airways dispute—France and Italy? Germany? The Arab business in Palestine? Nothing to make a war out of, *surely?*"

"No ships. No lights," answered Rattray grimly, as he gazed towards Simonstown.

"Only little fishing-boats *that ran from us as if we were devils. . . .*"

"Well, suppose it *is* war. They'd put out the coastwise lights anyway, if there was any likelihood of an enemy being about. And the ships'd be held back till there were enough of 'em to form convoy."

"Yes—but the fishing-boats? And why were there no trawlers on the Bank? And where are the naval patrols? This bay ought to be *alive* with 'em. Ought to have sighted us long ago—and stopped us—for examination. Where—where's *everything? What'll we find when we get ashore?*"

There was a dreadful silence.

"Well," said Dane at last, in a flatly helpless tone, "it's no good worrying till we know. And we can't make port in the dark if there aren't any lights. We'll have to anchor where we are and go on in to-morrow. Then we *shall* know."

So the anchor went down, dragging its roaring chain after it—a sound that was very strange in their ears, for of late they had begun to lose hope of ever hearing it again.

They had won through—they were *home!*

But—what had come to the world while they had been out of it?

JUST after midnight, John Dane rolled over in his bunk, sighing heavily in his sleep.

Then he sat up sharply, broad awake. A hand had shaken him; a figure with an oil-lantern stood over him. He peered up into the face of Jackson, the seaman on watch.

"What's the matter?" he asked "Weather coming up?"

"No; still fine and clear, Ou Baas; but there's a steam launch alongside and a young officer come aboard. Says he's the officer of the guard and he wants to see you at once."

"Officer of the guard? Launch alongside? Naval launch? What ship's she from?" demanded Dane, his pulses quickening. "Can you see the ship at all?"

"No—there's no other ship in sight. I was just baiting my line again—we've caught four good fish to-night, Ou Baas—when up she comes, with her funnel pouring out sparks (she's burning wood, and that's funny for a start), and she hails us. And this officer comes aboard with pistols all over him, and there's three armed navy sailors on deck, and—"

"Show the officer in here," said Dane tightly.

Jackson went out with the lantern. Dane got out of his bunk, lit the gimbaled candle-lamp which hung on the cabin wall beside his pillow, and slipped into an overcoat. Then he sat down to await the stranger—the first stranger any of them had seen since they had left the Cape nearly two years before. He had a feeling akin to what they had all felt at the dropping of the anhcor. If that had symbolized their return to the world, this moment meant far more. In a few seconds he would be *talking* to the world again. Yet the thought did not thrill him for more than an instant. He was far too anxious. What had been happening all this time? Anything might have happened. Even here in South Africa, on the outskirts of things, much must have happened, if only to account for this lightless coast, and the dearth of shipping. And why was the base of His Majesty's Africa Station guarded by a little steam-launch, burning unsuitable wood-fuel? Motor-boats had long since superseded the steam picket-boat in the navy. . . .

That question of fuel . . . he felt that there was some crucial clew there. Motor-boats burned petrol. A steam-launch was in use. Steam-launches burned coal. This one was burning wood, the old-time, universal fire of Man. You got petrol only out of holes in the ground, here and there, in odd places on the planet; and you had to refine it with complicated plant, and bring it thousands of miles in tankers, and store it in great things like gasometers. You got coal a little more easily, from not so far away. There was coal in the Eastern Province, at Indwe, and more in the Transvaal and Natal. It would have to come here by rail or sea. But you could get wood anywhere. . . .

Yes: the clew *was* crucial.

These thoughts went very quickly through his brain. He tried to quiet them. What was the use of this guessing at things when in a few seconds he would know, by mere asking?

But there *must* be *something* badly wrong, if the Navy here, in war-time, had no petrol and no coal—and guarded its dockyard with launches.

Perhaps this boat was just a humble unit of the ordinary night-patrol. Perhaps she had just closed to investigate, as a mere part of the patrol-routine. Doubtless if the *Langford Hall* had looked at all like an enemy there would have been Very flares from that launch, and a cruiser alongside by now with searchlights.

He had already accounted, to Rattray, for the lack of lights and ships on the coast. But—he could not get past those wood-sparks that Jackson had reported from the launch's funnel.

There was a noise of footsteps on the ladder, on the narrow railed bridge-deck outside his cabin; and a thin-faced officer stepped in.

At once—he could not avoid it, even in candlelight—Dane was struck by the curious, unwinking stare of his eyes. They had a searching, questioning look, with an eerie under-appearance of—what *was* it?—almost one might call it bewilderment. They were like the hurt, puzzled eyes of a dog, punished by his master for a reason that he cannot understand. They gave Dane a weird reaction of mingled impatience and pity.

He was a sub-lieutenant; and the single stripe on his sleeve was frayed and tarnished. A button was missing from the breast of his monkey-jacket. His cap-cover was very dirty. Dane's heart sank and sank.

"Sorry I'm not dressed to receive you," Dane began, in as normal a tone as he could muster. "Look here, what's been happening? We've been stuck away down in the Antarctic for nearly two years, without wireless or anything, and we don't know. . . . Sit down and tell us about—"

"The Antarctic?" broke in the other, in a tone of dulled disillusion. Then:

"What ship is this? Where from and where bound?" he asked; and it was as if he repeated a lesson.

"The *Langford Hall,*" answered Dane, in surprise at the other's manner. "But it's rather a long story. As I say, we've been down in the Antarctic. If you'll sit down—"

"How do I know—" began the sub-lieutenant.

"Sit down and listen!" replied Dane, a sharpening authority in his voice, for his surprise had given way to some annoyance now. "My name's Dane. Leader of the South African Antarctic Expedition. John Dane. Lieutenant-Commander R. N. R.," he added, remembering his long-forgotten rank in a sudden inspiration.

"How do I know?" repeated the other in the same flat, official tone as before.

"Oh, look me up in the Navy List when you get back!" he snapped, growing angry. This was absurd. Apart from the stupid, galling bathos of it. . . .

"You can take us in under guard or do anything you like. We want to go in, anyhow. We're nearly out of fuel and the ship's sinking slowly all the time. My name's *Dane,*" he repeated loudly, with a sudden idea that perhaps the officer was deaf. "Doesn't that convey anything to you?"

"No, it doesn't," said the officer of the guard, weakly; and he sat down on the settee under the scuttle, and leaned forward, elbow on knee, chin resting on hand.

"Well, look here," went on Dane, with a great effort at self-control. "If my name conveys nothing to you, perhaps you've heard of the Expedition—the South African Antarctic Expedition," he repeated.

THE sub-lieutenant was silent, the officious mask gone completely from his face. His young brow was all puckered up, as though he would pin down some elusive memory. Then he turned his strange, bright, staring eyes on Dane again, and in them was an utter bafflement.

"I can't understand—"

"We left Cape Town on October 16th, nearly two years ago. Damn it, the *Springbok* was refitted here, in this dockyard. We—" He broke off.

"Springbok . . . Springbok?" the officer was muttering, staring at the wall.

There was dead silence for a whole minute—a minute in which Dane's shocked brain ran riot; then the young man shook his head.

"No good," he sighed. "I suppose I *ought* to remember—but I can't. You say you've been in the Antarctic?" he asked, his official manner struggling back into his voice.

"We lost the *Springbok* the day we got into Mills Bay. We'd only just wirelessed that we were landing there. And . . . but damn it all!" he burst out suddenly, overcome by the memory of all that he and his had had to endure since that day. "I want to know why we weren't relieved. We waited all winter and well into last summer to be relieved. *Something* ought to have been done, and I'm damned well going to find out, as soon as I get ashore, why nothing *was* done!

"It's cost the lives of twelve damned good men, and it's no thanks to you people ashore that it didn't cost *all* our lives! We had to push off in boats, and let the pack drift us north—we were trying to make the Crozets. We'd never have done it. If it hadn't been for finding this ship, by sheer chance, drifting— No: not sheer chance," he corrected himself slowly. "Sheer Providence. If we hadn't found her, and got aboard by the skin of our teeth, and repaired her engines. . . ."

Dane's voice trailed away. He saw that the officer was not taking in what he said. He did not even seem to be trying to take it in.

"I'll have to bring you in to Simonstown for examination," he said, like an automaton. "You can see the C-in-C. . . ."

"Well, that's all right," agreed Dane wearily. "I'll be seeing him anyhow. We were coming in to-morrow anyhow, as I told you. We'd have been in to-night, only you're showing no lights. . . . Why not? Enemy about?" He tried to make the question sound casual.

"We can't. We haven't any—" began the other, in a more natural voice, though strained and high-pitched; but he stopped himself. A look of cunning, even more pathetic than his first staring bewilderment, had come into his face. "Admiralty orders," he began again, with an abrupt return to the official tone. "No lights to be shown. . . . I'll take you in for examination early in the morning. This ship is under arrest."

With a mighty effort Dane mastered his feelings and stilled the tumult of questioning within his astounded, sickened soul.

"Just as you like," he said carelessly. "In the meantime I'd like to turn in again. It's pretty late. If you'd like to turn in too I can—"

"No, thank you. I'm on duty." Again that cunning look.

"Well, I'm sorry I've nothing to drink to offer you."

The young fellow's head jerked up.

"Have you—have you got," he stammered out, hesitant, almost apologetic, but with a sudden intense undernote as of an eager hope that he could not control; "have you got—anything to *eat*—on board?"

There was a dreadful silence. The question had struck on Dane's already reeling brain with the force of a sledge-hammer, crushing his last hopes under it. The officer's face swam dizzily before him—but even as it swam he noted the fleshless features, the overbright eyes . . . he ought to have seen them before, these too-familiar symptoms of starvation. . . . The poor young devil. . . .

Anything to eat? His own stomach cried out at the words.

Anything to eat? And the boy had just come from Simonstown Naval Dockyard, from the land they had struggled for months to reach, the goal that had conjured up visions of plenty which alone, sometimes, had steeled them to endure and fight on!

Slowly Dane shook his head; and heard himself speaking.

"We're starving ourselves," he said.

The officer reeled on the settee and put out a hand to save himself.

"We've nothing but the sugar in the cargo," Dane went on. "We've tried that. Makes us sick. You're welcome to all you want of *that*. . . ."

He checked and controlled himself, aghast at the incipient panic of his own voice; and then he remembered Jackson's report of fish caught since anchoring. (They had found lines in the bos'n's store, and with them had had occasional fortune all along—though never enough to do more than whet their ever-growing hunger.)

"We've a little fish," he said now. "Caught to-night. Four of 'em. To divide between twenty-eight of us. They'll be shared out in the morning. There may be more by morning. The watchman's got lines out. . . . You and your men," he went on faintly, "will be welcome to a share. . . . Here—don't—good Lord—!"

The officer had been listening with a growing bitterness, a disillusioned hopelessness, showing all too plainly in his face. Now he seemed to crumple in upon himself, giving way to utter despair, collapsing on the settee.

"When we saw you coming," he mumbled brokenly, indistinctly, his face buried in his arms, "we hoped it meant—help. From England. . . . Or *somewhere*. . . . We were —fishing—when we saw your lights. . . . There aren't many fish—here now—ever since it happened—you see, the gas must have killed them. And there hasn't been—enough to eat—ashore—ever since—oh, I don't remember *when*. . . ."

It was horrible, almost unbelievably horrible, to hear and see. Dane tried to believe that it was nightmare, of the kind that they had all so often dreamed, back in the boats, on the ice, even in the hut at Mills Bay. It *must* be nightmare. It *could* not be true.

A tiny flicker of hope came to him. Wasn't it possible that the whole thing was just a dream? From the very beginning? From the moment the *Springbok* had anchored in Mills Bay? The sudden loss of her, the months of waiting in the hut, the dying hopes of rescue, the start of the boat-journey, the whole ghastly gamut of hardship and death—and now this dreadful proof of greater hardship and death, far greater, come to the world they had faced and conquered so much to reach—*must* it not be the figment of a dream?

Would he presently awaken to real life again in his cabin, in the dear old ship again—to the sound of that semi-diesel winch-engine, the shining of wire-rope from the derricks, and the sledge-parties loading the landed stores on the ice, there between the beach and the glacier-tongue? And the hammering from the carpenters, up there where the hut took shape under their hands, with good old taciturn Mackworth in charge—not dead, after all, but living? And Walters, and Sykes, proud beside his blubber-stove; and Kildale and Mills and Bartlett; and Morris and Simms and Ray and Jacks—all those good fellows, still alive and well?

But this lightness of his head, the gnawing emptiness of his stomach—were they the stuff of dreams?

Miserably, slowly, with fumbling fingers, he loosed the brass buttons from the stiff cloth button-holes of the overcoat, dragged it off and crawled up again into his bunk.

The officer on the settee had fainted—or he slept. Dane neither knew nor cared. He only knew that the load which had crushed him so long, the burden of leadership and the lives of his men, had not lifted from him but had become heavier than ever; he only knew that the haven for which they had fought so long and so hard, with such awful labor and loss, could offer them no succor; he only knew that the land he had tried to serve, that the very Comonwealth itself, the Empire, must —at the *best*—be struggling as they themselves had struggled, for barest life. If they were all starving ashore here, anything was possible.

Thought after spectral thought came gibbering through his brain as he lay. England, unready as usual—caught unawares as before—by the world-evil in which she had so often refused to believe—till it had actualy leapt at her half-guarded throat. Had she, at last, tempted the Fates beyond even *their* indulgent patience?

Was the answer to that question lying here, on this settee?

John Dane buried his face in the pillow. An awful blackness had him by his very soul. From the silence of this cabin his mind looked flinchingly out, spellbound by an abominable fascination, on vision after dreadful vision.

At last, in mercy, there came sleep—and a ceasing, for a time, of his miseries of foreboding.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"THAT'S THE LIMIT!"

"SEVEN good-sized fish during the night, Ou Baas," said Paton, his spectacled face peering in through the door-curtain, next morning; and four small red romans. At least, that's what Hamilton says they are. Being cooked now. Are we—going to feed the navy people too? They don't seem to have brought anything with them."

Dane raised himself on his elbow and stared down at the settee. He had awakened with a sense of some vague oppression on his spirits, a feeling that *something* had gone most utterly wrong. He could not at first remember what it was, but knew it was something vast and final, that no efforts of his could alter. Now, at sight of the sleeping sub-lieutenant, his overnight imaginings flooded over him again; and his impulse was to fling himself back on the pillow and shut his eyes, close up his brain, escape from his own consciousness again. Oh, how tired he was of it all! How wearily disheartened! What was the good of trying to go on now—with anything?

But Paton was watching him, waiting for his answer. He was still their leader here. He could not escape that. He must put on his harness once more, get back into the galling collar once again.

If they had needed him and looked to him before, how much more was he needed now?

"Share and share alike," he pronounced. "And after we've fed we're going in to Simonstown. Then I'm to see the admiral. And nobody else is to go ashore till I've seen him—and seen you and Ransome and the Skipper afterwards. Things ashore aren't—well, they aren't quite what we'd expected. At least, I'm *afraid* they aren't. And I expect we'll—have to make some sort of a plan."

"Why—what's wrong? Of course I heard about there being a war on—nobody can talk about anything else—but we can't get a word out of those blue-jackets except that we're being taken in for examination. They seem sort of queer in their ways, and . . . oh, I don't know. It's all a bit unnerving. And surely they don't think we're—"

That's—just routine. If there was nothing more I shouldn't worry much. But it's a damned sight worse than that. Far as I can make out, Simonstown's starving."

Paton stared at him in dumfounded amazement, then at the officer, who had stirred. If he wanted confirmation of the thing Dane had said, it was there in front of him, plain to see in the daylight. The boy's face was ghastly.

"But—what on earth can have happened?" he stammered.

"We'll know to-day, when I see the admiral. This chap can't—or won't—tell me anything much. Let's hope it's not as bad as it looks. That's all I can say now."

He thought of the boy's obvious evasions, his clumsy refusal to give information about those lighthouses, about *anything.*

But there was something else haunting Dane's memory: that look of the youngster's eyes, that first impression he had had of him, as of a dog unjustly punished, and wondering, afraid. . . .

And he knew, as he recalled it, that it was born of something greater and deeper and far more soul-obsessing than even hunger could be. *And*—he had seen that look once before, somewhere. A sort of still terror, glazed by horrors, waiting for more. *Where?* It was suddenly of vast importance that he should remember.

He had it! Years ago he had seen it—on the faces of the people who stood and wandered, dazed and helpless and demoralized, among the ruined mounds of rubble that had been a town in New Zealand, wrecked by an earthquake which still shook the littered ground. Even as it had destroyed their homes, that quaking had shattered also their faith in all things. They had fled out from the disintegrating bricks of the homes that their own hands had built—to find no security even upon the very earth itself. If even the planet was not stable and enduring, where could they flee? There was no escape. So their faces had told each other—told him and his rescue-party from the sloop-of-war in the bay—in the panic-stare of creatures irrevocably trapped.

And then he recalled other things about his overnight visitor.

"Pater," he said quietly, "will you tell Hay and Meldrum I want 'em here—to have breakfast in here, with me—and this officer?"

As the meteorologist left, the young man waked and moved his head, blinking dull-eyed at the stained white enamel of the cabin's ceiling. Then he seemed to realize where he was, and turned his gaze on Dane, who had lowered himself now from the bunk and stood looking down at his guest.

"Breakfast in a few minutes," he said; and the watching eyes brightened. "We had quite decent luck with the lines last night. If the fish have been scarce here, as you said, they're evidently beginning to come back again. With your permission we'll get under way as soon as we've fed. By the way, you didn't tell me your name."

"Carter."

"Well, Mr. Carter, I'm sorry we didn't make you more comfortable last night. You said you didn't want to turn in, though; and the fact is I was just about done in myself—and some of the things you told me simply drove everything else out of my head."

"*What* did I tell you last night?" demanded Carter, half sitting up, in sudden alarm.

"You told me you hadn't had enough to eat since God knew when. And you're a naval officer, stationed at an important naval base! I can't get over it! What the devil's *happened?"*

The other's face began to work, his eyes to shift quickly from side to side. He swallowed, and his tongue touched his lips and licked them.

Then his features resumed their professional mask, hardened, became mulish, pedantic.

"You'll have to ask the admiral. We've orders to give no information."

"But—"

Dane checked himself. He saw that it was useless. And at that moment the two doctors came in. He introduced them by their names only, and then set himself to watch them, with an unobtrusive vigilence that missed nothing. He was, very soon, sadly rewarded.

"What's this about a war?" asked Hay at once. "We're all dying to hear about it. Been out of everything—nearly two years away. Who's fighting whom? And why?"

"I'm sorry, but I can give you no information," repeated Carter mechanically.

The two doctors looked at him, with surprised enquiry; then at Dane, then back at the officer—this time with studied unconcern.

"Quite right," said Hay heartily. "Never let out official secrets. Still, I do think it might be safe to tell us who we're fighting. After all, the enemy probably knows that already," he added whimsically.

The boy shuddered a little; his eyes began to flicker again, then to shuttle to and fro; he swallowed again and again, his teeth locked; and now his limbs twitched uncontrollably.

"The aeroplanes! Oh, God, the aeroplanes!" he cried, with a sudden sharp shrillness. *"Gas! A wall of gas! And the bombs!"*

Dane's blood ran chill at the sight and sound of it. But Hay and Meldrum exchanged glances.

"I *see,"* said Hay. "Well, they've gone now. Gone now—you hear? And there won't be any more. And breakfast'll be here in a minute." At his words, and the calm kindness of the voice in which they were spoken, the shaking figure began to relax again.

DANE had sorrow for a young mind blasted; but, over-spreading that sorrow, filling and flooding him again as it had submerged him overnight, was that monster hag-thought that would not leave him. *This* was all that the navy could find now to protect one of its harbors, a strategic base of world-importance. A crazed and starving boy. . . .

Unless—unless, perhaps. . . .

Surely, yes. They *could* not have sent him out like this He had gone out of his mind since coming on patrol. He *must* have done that.

They had been through a bad time ashore—the Empire had been through a bad time. England always *did* have a bad time, at first. And her state might still be very critical. But it *could* not be as bad as this lad had allowed his panicked brain to imagine. He must himself be weaker and more over-wrought than he had realized. Long privation and the never-ceasing strain of anxious leadership had begun to tell, and tell heavily. He would have to get a grip on himself; put a stop to all this useless, febrile speculation. He had got to think of his men—and their next meal. Here was breakfast now. After that they would weigh anchor and go in, and he would hand poor young Carter over to the medical authorities, and see the admiral, and learn the real truth of all that had passed and was passing.

So they emptied their unsatisfying plates of the fish that had been caught and cooked, Dane and the two doctors and Carter. It had been a silent meal—very quickly over.

Dane and the sub-lieutenant joined Rattray on the bridge, and Pearson went to the foc's'le-head. The weather had not changed. There was no wind at all, and the sky was still cloudless. The Cape Peninsula, bare and brown and jaggedly upstanding, reared itself mightily to the west; to the north rose Muizenberg, clear-cut in the strong morning light, and the False Bay coastline sweeping across towards the eastern mountains. Simonstown was a distant stippling of buildings on the lower slopes of the Berg that towered over it and its little bay. Of the dock-yard they could see only a tiny pale-gray glimpse of its eastern harbor-wall.

Rattray was gazing that way through the ship's glasses; and he thought he saw masts rising from behind the wall, but could not be sure of it at this distance.

"We'll take your launch in tow," said Dane, and Carter agreed without apparent interest. She was a fifty-two-foot picket-boat, of an obsolete type, old and battered and with the faded paint peeling from her woodwork. Her decks were strewn with the impediments of fishing. A strange craft to be flying the pennant of an officer-of-the-guard. . . .

They could not weigh the anchor. Like everything else aboard which had been electrically driven, the motor which drove the capstan was useless.

"Slip the cable," ordered Dane. "We shan't want it again. The ship is done for, if it comes to that."

So they slipped, and the chain roared out and disappeared; and from below there came the clang of the telegraph and a great hissing and blowing of compressed exhaust-gases from the starting-reservoir, rushing into the reluctant cylinders. With a thud and a clanking protest the engines started; the ship began to swing very slowly as the steersman aft wrestled with the wheel. They were under way again: in two hours at most, now, their long odyssey would be over and they would set foot once more on solid land—for the first time since they had left the Antarctic continent, nearly nine dragging and terrible months before.

As he thought of all that had passed over them since, it seemed like nine years to John Dane.

One of the armed guards had joined his officer on the bridge. Dane looked at the man—a big, stolid-looking fellow who wore the cap-ribbon of H. M. S. *Doncaster*. He remembered her: one of the "town" class cruisers which had been based on the Station when the *Springbok* had left. Probably, then, it was her masting that Rattray had picked out with the glasses, rising behind the east wall of the dockyard.

The man's uniform and web-equipment were no more reassuring than his officer's. They were old and stained, with clumsy patching here and there; but at least the rifle looked well cared for. There was another guard stationed on the foc's'le, looking aft and commanding the well-deck. The third stood on the poop with the steersmen.

The ship was working slowly up to her pitiful speed, and, for the moment, Dane forgot the naval men in the business of setting and steadying her on her course. Then Rattray drew him aside.

"I'm damned if I understand all this," said he, "War or no war, there still ought to be food in the country. The land's still there, isn't it? And cattle, and wheat, and maize, and fruit and vegetables and poultry? What's the matter with 'em ashore? Why the devil don't they—"

One of the guards answered the question—though at that time they could not know it was an answer. There was a clang and a clatter from the steel deck of the foc's'le. Both started and stared for'ard. The bluejacket there had dropped his rifle; and now he stood swaying over it, as if overcome by a sudden dizzy faintness. He half bent to pick it up, staggered forward past it, and brought up against the guard-rails on the port side. He clung to the rails to save himself. He tottered for a moment like a tree that is about to fall, then crashed down and lay struggling impotently to rise again.

Several of Dane's men started forward to help him. Then Carter spoke, almost as if to himself, without turning from the bridge-rail, in a voice of weary hopelessness.

"Leave him alone. You can't do anything. He'll get up again after a bit. It's only sickness. We all get it. . . . Nobody can do anything for it. . . ."

"Good God!" breathed Rattray. "Did you hear that, Jack?"

"I'm—trying to believe I didn't," muttered Dane starkly.

"What's it mean?"

"What does *everything* mean?"

Pause.

The man on the foc's'le lay quietly now, except for the rapid rise and fall of his chest. Dr. Meldrum was bending over him, with an astonished group of others standing helplessly around. Dane saw him straighten up, then order them to pick up the man. They did so, and carried him down into the foc's'le. Up to the bridge came Hay.

"See *that,* Ou Baas?" he asked in a guarded tone, with a side-glance at the half-oblivious naval office. "What do you think we are *in for?* I thought *this* chap was going into a fit in your cabin before breakfast, and now there's this man of his. . . . Shell-shock—or rather, bomb-shock—I can understand. Gas-effects I can understand. Weakness and fainting-fits I'd expect, with starvation, or even malnutrition. . . . There's the effect on the brain, too, of all these things—and the general mess-up that seems to have happened ashore. I mean, their clothes look as if demoralization of some sort's set in. And these things would all react and interact. . . . But there's something more . . . something *else* as well. In all of them. I've been watching them. And I can't make it *out—*"

"He *says* they've all got it," Dane explained. "Says there's nothing to be done about it. That nobody can do anything about it."

"Did he? . . ." Hay shook his head. "Well, that bears out what I said. Demoralization. They're hopeless about things. . . . There's more here than we can understand—till we get ashore and find out from some one who knows. They'll probably know at the hospital, up on the hill there behind the town. . . .

CARTER was now leaning with both elbows on the bridge-rail, looking out towards Simonstown. He seemed to have forgotten that there was any one else on the bridge. He took no notice of the their murmured conversation. Meldrum made as if to approach him, but Hay stopped him; and the two drew apart, argumentatively technical.

"Oh, well, I suppose they'll know about it ashore, anyway," reiterated the elder doctor; then he too looked out towards the land, in a sudden abstraction of thought. His face grew graver and graver. Dane watched him, unconsciously biting his lip.

"For Heaven's sake, out with it, Doc!" he prompted anxiously at last. "I can't stand this guessing much longer!"

"I'm only guessing," answered Hay, turning slowly towards him. "You see—this is something utterly new. There's nothing in our experience that begins to account for it—apart from what I said before, about bomb-shock and the other things. But—I'm afraid—*they're* only—incidentals. . . . But I'd rather not say any more—now. I *must* have more information before I do. I may be wrong. . . . Lord! I *hope* I'm wrong—*What's up with the Skipper?"*

Rattray had taken the glasses again from their box on the rail, and he was holding them now to his eyes with hands that shook, more and more uncontrollably.

He was looking at Simonstown. And there was something strange about those houses clustered along the lower slope of the Berg, about the long line of the town, strung out on either side of the road. There was something queerly irregular about the line of that dockyard wall, and the masts behind it seemed to have an unusually raking slant. They were still too far off to see details, but. . . .

"This place has been wrecked," said Rattray hoarsely. "Bombed or shelled or burned or all three—to blazes! And it looks to me as if the dockyard—"

His word must have penetrated to Carter's twilit brain, for he swung round; and his lips were twisted in a snarl.

"No tricks!" he snapped, with pathetic bravado. "Don't you go and think we're helpless because we've been knocked about a bit! I've only got to make the signal and you'll be blown out of the water!"

"Look here, Mr. Carter," said Hay with kindly firmness, and a hand on the youngster's tensed arm, "damn it all, we're friends—British as you are. Confound it, I used to be in the Service myself!"

On the instant, the boy's insane blaze of defiance went out.

"Oh, were you?" he asked, with a flutter of interested respect. For a moment he seemed almost to have regained some grip of his own mind. He looked at Dane. *"You* said you were in the Service too—last night—R.N.R., wasn't it? . . . I wish to *God* I could remember!" he burst out piteously. "I *know* I ought to remember. Dane—the *Springbok*—Antarctic. . . ."

He turned away, his shoulders sagging, and walked by himself to the other end of the bridge. Dane watched him go; and his sight was a little blurred.

The ship plugged on, very noisily, shaking all over to the *bang-slam* of her wretched engines, her long-drawn voyage nearly done now.

Plainly now and yet more plainly they

saw the havoc that had been done to the town and harbor they approached. Where the buildings were thickest, along the low-level main-road, they stood burned out and roofless, with great rubbled gaps here and there. The dockyard itself was a thrice-wrecked ruin, its huge oil tanks just so many burst and rusted masses of steel plating; its power-station a mound of bricks with roof-beams and bits of corroded machinery protruding; and the big sheds had housed the multitudinous stores and workshop-plant of a naval base were no better.

As the *Langford Hall* passed and began clumsily to turn in towards the northward-facing entrance, they saw that even the encircling quays of the basin had not escaped the general destruction: there were jagged gaps torn here and there in their surface and sides, through which in places the sea washed gently in its calm; the sheds built upon them had collapsed over them, blown apart and blackened. An enormous fire must have raged for days on the coaling-jetty, where supplies of coal had been kept for sloops and minesweeper-trawlers and an occasional coal-burning naval transport; and the big crane at the northeast corner had fallen in twisted ruin into the bomb-crater beside it.

The ship went on turning, slowly and yet more slowly as the engines were slackened down, swinging to enter in past the bull-nose. Not a man on her decks moved or spoke: they stood like stricken statutes.

The whole basin now lay spread out before them, quiet and still within its ravaged arms, bathed in the strong morning sunlight, its very silence shrieking forth the truth. There was no hope of mistake here.

Dane drew in his breath, choked back a sob of sheer grief for the Things that lay in that basin—Things which once had been two cruisers, powerful and stately and crowded with men disciplined and contented, proud in their speckless paintwork and fluttering ensigns. But now the masts of one of them protruded from the water alongside the west, or shoreward, wall; heeling outwards, with forebridge and funnel-tops just showing, and a drab, long-necked sea-bird perched on one of them. And the other had been overwhelmed as she had lain, in dry dock, when the water had burst in on her through the blown-up caissons of its entrance. . . .

Nowhere could they see a living soul!

"We'd better go to the east wall," said Rattray, in the hushed voice of one who speaks before an open grave. "It seems clear. . . . Port side alongside. Stop engines. Aft, there—starb'd your helm."

SILENCE again, but for the thudding of the pumps and the swish of their expelled water alongside. The ship slid slowly on, beginning to slant in towards the quay as the men at the slow hand-wheel dragged it round . . . and round . . . and round. She had been hard enough to handle in the open sea: they could not hope to bring her properly alongside the solid stonework of the wall, with unreliable engines and this tardy, laborious helm—and no one ashore to take their ropes.

It was this last thing that brought the truth so intimately home. They were docking in a haven of the dead.

"Midships! Hard a-port!"

It was time to check her ponderous swing. In another half-minute or so he would reverse the engines. In addition to stopping her headway, this should screw her stern in sideways towards the wall. By then the bow would also be close in: they could do the rest with the ropes.

"Lower away the port sea-boat, Pearson, and take our head-rope to those steps."

The boat slid jerkily down from the davits with a squealing of long-unused blocks, was pulled up for'ard to the ship's bows and the big looped "eye" of the heavy wire hawser-end lowered down with a heaving-line.

"Quick with it!" begged Pearson. "We're leaking like a basket."

The words rang out in that still place like a blasphemy. But they were true enough. The boat's seams had opened in the months that she had been on her chocks.

The eye was seized and held; and the two men in her rowed the boat to the concrete quay-steps while the wire was payed out and down after from the foc's'le. After a struggle—for their arms were weak and nerveless—they reached their goal and slowly climbed the steps with the heaving-line, then dragged it and its dependent hawser along the wall to the nearest bollard.

"Stern-rope now — stern-rope — quick!" shouted Rattray. He wanted it to check her; his professional soul revolted from this clumsily disastrous docking. The head-rope lifted taut as the ship overshot the bollards; began to slide out, grunting and groaning around the ship's own bollards, the strain of its complaint mounting steadily, till it snapped with a report like a twelve-pounder. The whipping backlash of its splayed-out strands hurt nobody: all had jumped clear. And the ship went on, only just moving now, scraping her weary flank almost lovingly against the solid, man-laid masonry that she had once thought never to know again—till the stern-rope, passed from poop to shore, brought her up at last.

With a sensation of solemnity that was heart-catching, Dane put forth his hand to the telegraph, and turned it four times back and forth, through the full swing of its travel, to a clanguor of bells below, and then dropped his hand to his side.

"Finished with engines," said the pointer.

Finished. . . .

The *Langford Hall* had served her turn; and now she could rest, settling down here slowly beside the warships.

But the men of her—these twenty-eight Antarcticans she had brought through hardship and hunger and danger and endeavor untellable, men who stared out now dazedly at the stark ruin to which she had brought them, crushed by this the undreamed-of tragedy of their homecoming—these had yet a part to play in the divine fore-ordering, in that ages-long warfare of Good and Evil whose mighty ebb-and-flow pulses always, dim-seen but very real, behind all the purblind strugglings of mankind.

"SKIPPER," said Dane as he left the bridge for the last time, "I've got to go ashore with Carter. I don't know what I'm going to find. Anything's possible—anything. I'll be back as soon as I can, but if I *don't* come back carry on as best you can. And look here—we mustn't get separated any more than we can help. Nobody else is to go away from here until I'm back—or till you reckon I'm not coming. Give me till—give me three hours. I don't know how long the admiral may keep me, but I ought to be back before then. If I can get it, I'll have help and food sent down. But it looks as if they're in a pretty bad state themselves.

"Don't count on too much. In the meantime, get everything out on the quay that's likely to be any good to us—the ship's sinking all the time now the pumps have stopped, and that bump we gave her must have opened up fresh seams. . . . And another thing—after I've gone, you'd better send Pearson out fishing with that steam-launch. If you want more wood for fuel—well, there's still woodwork aboard here. Chop up all you can and stack it ashore. There's no coal left on that collier-jetty—it must have all been burnt up, or Carter would have been using it. . . . I wonder where he got the launch?"

"Probably lying in some odd corner, out of use. What I've been wondering about is how these men survived."

But, good Lord, *everybody* can't have been—"

"Gas," said Rattray simply. "What did he say? A wall of it. They'd drop a chain of gas-bombs to windward—the same as they did to this ship. Then they'd get to work with explosives and incendiary-bombs. . . . But—yes—*some* of 'em here would be able to get at their gas-masks in time, surely? And some would be on leave, and perhaps come back afterwards. . . The hell of it is, Carter can't tell us anything more. Doc says if even he tries to ask him, he just starts dithering. . . . I don't blame him. It must have been Hades. . . . But you must be right, Jack. They can't all have been killed ashore here. There's the admiral—and he must have some sort of a staff, I suppose. But why hasn't anything been done to clear up? Why haven't other ships been sent out to replace—these?"

"Carter let out—last night—that he'd hoped *we* were coming with help. . . . It does look bad."

"It looks *awful*, Jack."

"Well," finished Dane dully, "we'll know when I've seen the admiral. Here's Carter now. Have you got everything clear? Right!"

The two stood looking at one another, hesitant to part. Then Dane put out his hand quickly and slapped Rattray on the shoulder.

"We'll come through all right," he said. "You see. It *can't* be as bad as it looks."

The sub-lieutenant had been waiting impatiently at his elbow. His two men waited on deck, beside the launch, which was alongside. The third man was still in the foc's'le.

"Now, Mr. Carter, I'm ready. Where's this admiral of yours? How do we get to him?"

"The C-in-C is at Admiralty House," was the answer, its tone stiffly reproving. "We go in the launch. There is a landing in the outer dockyard, outside the basin. Admiralty House is on the lower side of the main road, over there."

He pointed towards the wrecked town.

"Very well. I'm ready. But you haven't got steam on the launch!"

Carter looked dully at him. "No; I haven't," he admitted. "I forgot. . . ."

He leaned slackly on the rail, his mouth sagging loosely open, in his eyes a look of complete resignation.

"I've got to the the admiral—quick!" insisted Dane. "We'll have to go by land, that's all. And—I'm sorry, but—I'm not certain I can walk as far . . . and what about you? Haven't you a car anywhere?"

Carter stared.

"Car?" he echoed.

"Motor-car, yes!" reiterated Dane shortly. It was difficult to keep his temper, hard to remember this boy's affliction. And he was ashamed of his own admission of weakness; but from the east wall to Admiralty House was nearly a mile. He remembered the place now. It opened on to the main road, as Carter had said, through gates in the long stone wall that divided the dockyard area from the town. His knees sagged under him at the thought of that walk—but he *could* not wait for the launch to raise steam.

"Yes," answered Carter slowly. "There are cars. Lots of cars." He laughed shrilly, and his eyes began to shuttle again; then with an effort he seemed to steady himself. "But there is no petrol. We used it all up—all we could find—long ago. Looking for food, you know. We'll *have* to walk. Come!"

The young voice had become extraordinarily firm and decisive. Dane looked at him; remembered his insistence on "examination," his pathetic bluff on the bridge, when Hay had quieted him—and in a flash of insight he understood, or thought he did. Carter was "carrying on." Or trying to. His damaged brain had held him inexorably, perhaps mechanically, to what it conceived to be his "duty." To uphold the Service, and the defense of its base. . . .

A lump came into Dane's throat. Though his world had flamed and smashed about his ears, this bewildered, unhinged, slowly starving boy clung yet to his cloth and to all that was left of its meaning. In face of such devotion, even though it were the devotion of insanity, he himself felt an odd contrition mingled with a poignant admiration for the lad himself, but still more for the Service which could so hold him.

"Come on, then," he said. "We'll have a shot at it."

So they two set off, stumbling at first and trying to help each other, leaning each against each, arm-in-arm. Often and more often they stopped to rest, and sat or even lay down in the road, fighting for breath and to ease their hammering hearts. The bomb-pitted, rubble-obstructed road up to the main gates seemed without end; it soon began to waver before them as a black and pock-marked snake of asphalt and its borders, with rags of blue uniforms about them, the dully tarnished badges of their ratings still showing here and there. And at the head of that awful column there lay among the bones the instruments of a brass-band, green with verdigris.

"Gold-braid badges—and a band!" flashed the ice-cold thought in Dane's horror-stricken mind. "God help them—they were caught on the way back to their ships—*from church*."

But he had no breath to ask even why they had had no burial. He could not have asked, had he had the breath. He feared the answer he might get.

They went on. The last uphill slant to the gates was like a mountain, but grimly they endured; and at last, panting and with bursting temples, they reached them, and rested for twenty minutes. After that it was easier for, turning to the right, they had the dockyard wall beside the main-road pavement for a handrail. True, it was broken down in some places, and calcined by the long-dead fires of incendiary-bombs, but it served.

And here and there were the bones of the dead, lying as they had fallen in this still and roofless town of the dead, all under the bright heat of the climbing sun; and as Carter had said, there were cars in the street, a number of cars, some of them unburned and uninjured in the road, with their people lying yet in them, or on the ground beside. Others were wrecked and reduced to sooted shells, their bonnets crushed in against the blackened and empty-windowed walls of the buildings on the road's upper side, just as they had struck when the gas-cloud had come, and the hands of their dying drivers had dropped away from their steering-wheels.

Only once, in that journey, did Dane see a living creature—apart from the birds that winged above and the flies that rose buzzing around them. It was a gray cat; and at sound of their uncertain feet it fled, its body close to the ground, its ears flattened down.

But of these things Dane took little note now. All his mind was bent to achieving the one purpose that had brought him here: to see the admiral who waited ahead there in his house, and *to know*.

So, after an age of treadmill tottering, the two passed in at the admiral's gates, in through the open front doorway—in to the dimness and cool shade within. The house was almost untouched.

An old-world mansion: retiring, patrician.

And a little later Dane lay back, in utter collapse, in a big and darkened room. He stared, chin on his laboring breast, at a seated figure beside a big table, clad in frockcoat, with sword and belt. And the belt hung very loosely about the shrunken waist.

The admiral seemed very tired, for his head was down on his gold-laced arms. He did not move when Carter reeled to his side; nor did he stir when, through roaring eardrums, Dane heard the sub-lieutenant begin to gasp out his "report."

Mistily he saw the youngster sway and stagger and collapse—as that man of his had collapsed, back on the foc's'le-head of the *Langford Hall*. Slowly, then, his sight began to clear; and he knew that the admiral had been sitting for a long time at this table—sitting there dead, and mummified.

Bemused, astounded, stunned, gripped by a great lethargy, his mind now mercifully dulled by his last and most dreadful blow, Dane must have lain in that armchair for nearly half an hour. If he thought at all it was very slowly and in profitless circles, like a trapped creature crawling again and again around the walls of its prison, knowing that there is no escape, but continuing its useless search by merely mechanical volition, its wearying legs dragging on and on.

It was with a start, as of one waking from sleep, that he returned to full consciousness. He was careful not to look now at the frock-coated Thing at the table, but saw that Carter lay full length on the floor at Its feet, face downwards.

Dane tried to get up out of his chair, but his body would not at first obey a command that was itself only half-hearted. He would rest a little longer yet—before he tried to rouse the other. For then, somehow—they would have to get back to the *Langford Hall*.

At length, marshaling himself step by step for the task before him, he forced his limbs to lift him and stood swaying, supported by his hands on the chair-arms, his head spinning. Slowly, as he waited and willed, it steadied; and then he seemed to drift without effort towards his unconscious companion, and was on his knees beside him. But it was useless. He could not wake him.

"I can't leave him *here*," he whispered. "Not with—that. But I can't *carry* him back to the ship."

It swam into his brain that Carter must have *put* the body into that chair by the table, months ago; that he had served the dead, gone on serving the dead, as a machine may go on running after the controlling hand has dropped from the level—like the engines of the *Langford Hall* had gone on running, after the gas had killed her engineers. . . .

But in the end those engines, starved of lubricating oil, had seized, jammed, ended themselves for all time—had not he and his men come to bring them again to life. He was to remember this thought.

Though his body would hardly obey him even now, Dane's mind had begun to work more clearly—almost too clearly. Carter . . . and his three men . . . were the only living garrison left in all Simonstown!

Perhaps Rattray would send to look for the two of them. But none of the men were in shape for a search-party. By the time they got here they would be as exhausted as he was himself. The only thing he could do was to try and get back alone. He ought to be able to do it. It was nearly all downhill. He had thought he could not walk here, but he had done it. Once back again, they could make some plan to bring Carter in. Perhaps his own men would be strong enough. . . .

He set his teeth. "I've got to try it," he ground out.

"Anybody here?" called a voice—Pearson's voice.

Dane cried out harshly, and was answered; shouted again in a feeble croak.

"We've brought the launch to fetch you—to see if you—" began Pearson, in the door; and stopped.

"Dead," said Dane. "And Carter's down, too."

"I'll—get help," gulped Pearson.

DANE sat propped against the bundled stores which his men, under Paton's indefatigable direction, with enormous but dogged labor, had been dumping out on the quayside from the slowly-sinking ship. His chin was on his panting breast again; his eyes were closed, his mouth a little open. Hay came, sat down beside him, loosened the clothing from his throat, sent for water and waited. There was no more that he could do. The men crowded round, waiting also—for what he had to tell, some of them cursing in low voices at sight of his extremity, one or two weeping silently, all of them very near to despair. God knows what they had expected from Dane's visit ashore: perhaps a motor-lorry, to take them away to houses, and beds, and bread, and the blessings of the land—somewhere—beyond this wrecked silence. At least they had looked for *some* relief, *some* message of hope. Anything, they had expected, but this.

"Rats, old lad!"

It was scarcely more than a whisper, but the captain heard.

" 'Nother drink of water."

Hay held the mug to Dane's lips and he drank, weakly gulping, then waved it away.

"Rats, old lad—and everybody—listen!" he croaked now. "Tough old gang—no one to pull us through . . . damn it, we've pulled—*ourselves*—through . . . so far . . . and we're going to—go *on*. . . . Can't kill us . . . Antarctic tried . . . Westerlies tried. The admiral's dead. . . . Been dead months . . . . Not a living soul in the place. All dead. . . . Is the launch still alongside?"

"No," said Rattray. "Pearson's taken her out—to catch fish."

"That's right. We want 'em. All he can get."

"God, yes!" grunted Hay. "Is there *nothing* ashore here, Ou Baas?"

"Can't be. Carter—starving. Must have —hunted every nook and corner."

"We've *got* to have food soon—or we'll be goners, the lot of us!" cried Hay despairingly. "We're too weak now to go and look for it, anyway. . . . We've reached the limit, Ou Baas!"

Dane struggled to sit up. Rattray leaned forward to help him.

"I want to stand up!" he said.

The captain and the doctor raised him to his feet. He stood between them, looking from man to man—there was an unquenchable fire burning in his sunken eyes.

"Doc says we've reached the limit!" he told them, and his voice was stranger, steadier. "What d'you think of *that?*" he added with a trace of his old-time, undefeatable grin. "We're alive still, arent' we? We're not *dead* yet, are we? Well, *that's* the limit, isn't it? It's—the only limit—I know anything about. . . . We've got the launch, haven't we? And plenty of wood to run it? We've drawn blank here—but there are other places on this coast, aren't there?"

"God knows," muttered Hay—and he voiced what they were all thinking.

"If we only knew where to go," said Ransome.

"We've got to try and stick to the launch —till we can find food—mustn't leave her till we can be *sure* of finding it—ashore," answered Dane.

He had sat down again, and rested once more against the piled gear. And Paton had called the men back to their work, leaving only the remaining officers of the Expedition around their leader. "The launch," he went on, "gives us *some* chance of life, as long as we stick to her. Fish. Better than—nothing. . . ."

"Carter," began Rattray.

"We'll take Carter—and his men—with us. It's no use—their staying here—any longer. . . . There'll be no trouble with Carter—now. As he is."

Hay nodded. "I can see to that, anyhow," he said. "He listens to me. . . . I think, really, he'll—look to us. His men do—already. . . . If we only had wireless," he muttered now in a fierce undertone. "Might get in touch with somebody, somewhere—find out what's really *happened*—find out where to go—"

"We *must* know where to go!" repeated Ransome. "If Knibbs could only find power for the ship's wireless. . . . There must be some way. . . ."

The electrician looked slowly and meaningly around the ruined dockyard, up to the bombed and burned-out town, then back at the others.

"The power-station's over there—where that rusty flywheel's sticking through what's left o' the roof. There might be an undamaged dynamo somewhere, and an engine to drive it, and power to drive the engine—or batteries, in some shop or somewhere that isn't burnt or smashed to bits, batteries with juice in 'em still. But by the time we've found all that—we'd all be dead, I think."

"We're—too far gone—to go wandering about ashore—looking for things that *might* help us—or might *not*," put in Rattray.

Miserably Hay agreed. "We can't carry on much longer," he had to say. "Human bodies won't stand it—to say nothing of our minds. *I've* got to keep a tight grip on myself *now*, or *I'd* go—" He left the word unsaid.

"What we've got to find is food," pursued Dane. "We can't do even that, ashore here. We couldn't get far on our feet. You know that. You've said so yourself, Doc. And—

I've proved it. . . . It's the launch for us. At least we can fish from her—as we go. We've *got* to get out of here. There's nothing here to help us. She'll *take* us out o' this. All we'll have to do is to steer, and shove wood into the fire. There's nothing for it but the launch."

"But where are we to *go?"* demanded Hay—and there was fear in his voice. "With nobody to tell us what's happened—"

Yes: that was the crux, and Dane knew it. His men must have food, and that soon, or they would die; he was their leader; whither should he lead them? Where, now, could they find the means of life—with this launch? Wherever they went, it would have to be near. Once they left the launch, they could not struggle far. He dared not make any mistake now. This venture must be their last throw. If he led them to another place of ruin and death, they were done for.

"I—I hate to say it," said Dane, "but I don't think—it'll be much use—making for any other *port*. Because the enemy—"

Hay's face went rigid with desperate self-control. He had left a wife and two grown-up daughters in Capetown. He had been trying not to think of them, of what must have happened to them—if Capetown had been served as Simonstown had been. The hearts of every one of these returned castaways had been heavy for hours with similar thoughts, a similar dread. Some had parents, brothers, sisters. There were those who had looked forward, for months, to this day when they would rush in suddenly on those they loved, and watch the amazement in their well-remembered faces turn to joy. But no one had spoken of such things. They did not bear speaking of. They could not really be grasped. It was all too huge, too unbelievable.

THERE are some things that the heart just *cannot* take in, whatever the brain may try to tell it. There had been tears in Rattray's eyes when he had first seen the skeleton of the *Langford Hall's* captain, lying there at the foot of his bridge-ladder. But he could not grasp *this*. Not yet. Hay had not really grasped it. None of them could quite believe that their eyes saw truly. For two years they had lived in a world of their own—a little, intimate, strenuous world of danger and ever-looming death. For many terrible months their whole efforts, their whole minds, had been centered on their own strivings, on fighting a way northward, on keeping themselves alive. Even the goal towards which they had struggled had often been overlaid—by the overmastering preoccupations of their very battle to reach it. And they were still preoccupied, for that battle for life was not yet over.

Thus it was that, although enough evidence lay already plain before them to tell very nearly all the truth, they had hardly done more than begin to read it aright. Starving men can thing clearly and connectedly of one thing, and one thing only. For these, it was as well that Nature should so have ruled; or they might then and there, some of them, have walked off this crumbling quay-edge and ended the matter.

But as it was—the sun was warm upon them, and they were very tired, and faint.

"We've got to go where the food *grows,"* said Dane. "And we've got to go by *sea*. Where, near the sea, is there a place—"

"Hout Bay!" cried Rattray. "Tarrant was telling me about it once. Land-locked place—mountains all round—crawfish-cannery—and *farms*. . . . Seventeen miles south of Table Bay. He used to sail down there in the long week-end holidays. . . . The—the enemy *may* have left Hout Bay—alone. . . ."

"Hout Bay? We'll try for it, then. Break up as much wood as the launch can carry. Eat what she's got when she comes back. Start to-morrow morning. We'll go by day only. Can't trust ourselves at night now. Might pile her up. Make Buffels Bay to-morrow night—that's still this side, before we double Cape Point. Don't think any one lives there, but if I remember right . . . it used to be a good spot for fishing. Go on again next morning. We ought to make Hout Bay from there in one day. . . . It's really only just across the Peninsula from here—a little to the nor-ard. But we've got to go round, right around, by sea. We can't *walk* it. And there's no petrol for any of those cars, even if they'd go. . . ."

"No use. Looks as though none o' those things are any use now. . . . This launch won't last very much longer. . . . Even the railway here—you can see it isn't running—hasn't been running for a long time."

Rattray pointed over to the terminus of the line north to Capetown. It was a couple of miles away, at the end of the long-straggling town. The place was gutted and with the glasses could be seen the wreckage of an electric train, lying just where it had stopped and been burned, over a year ago. But there was really no need to look. If the railway had been running there would have been people in Simonstown, and some kind of order, evolving out of chaos again. . . . Were *any* railways running? Was there order *anywhere?* They could not answer that.

In due time the launch returned, with a heartening load. Gladly they cooked and ate it, and began to talk hopefully of the morrow's journey, somehow persuading themselves that this time, at last, they would find rest and safety for body and heart and soul. And the blue-jacket who had fallen down in the "sickness" came out now from his coma, and ate with them —but was very silent, and dull-eyed, listlessly sub-human. And Doctor Hay watched him, his own eyes dark with questionings, very silent also.

A little after sunset the *Langford Hall* moved uneasily in the bondage of her ropes, scraped herself with mournful gratings against the stonework, tilted her well-decks under—and sank.

For a long time after that the air continued intermittently to come out of her, with dreary gurglings in the darkness.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"FINIS TERRE"

THE whole western heavens glowed a luridly ominous yellow, far up towards the zenith; and under them the sea heaved green and evil. Towards the north that unnatural gleam shaded off to a muddy gray, for the sky there was heavy with the menace of the first of the coming winter gales. Already a cold wind was gusting uncertainly from the north-east—the beginning of true cyclonic weather.

Presently it would veer northerly and freshen with pelting rain, working gradually around into the nor'west and steadying there to its full force. But that might take a day or two; and several days might then pass before the shift to the south-west came, with its break low down in the sky to windward and the promise of the cyclone's passing.

As yet, however, it had hardly begun.

Ahead, against that northern gray, loomed the gloomy mass of the mountain-system of the northern Peninsula, darkly leaden, half-obscured with cloud-wreaths of dirty and raddled wool. Tawnily brown with the sere grass of the long summer and autumn drought—breaking now—the vast out-jutting ram of Chapman's Peak stood forth sharply between the already plunging little launch and the haven that she would make. Just showing beyond its grim ending was the frowning precipice of Hangberg, the northern guardian of the Hout Bay entrance; and beyond it again reared the steep slant of Duiker Point, with a far fretting of white among the rocks that fringed its base.

Astern of them lay the low seaward sweep of Kommetje Point and its lighthouse pale against the dirtying blue of the south—but the spidery masts rose forlornly from where the Slangkop Wireless Station should have been.

No sign of life had shown itself in the little settlement, though Dane had steered closely past it. They had none of them felt much surprise, and by now the thing had been forgotten in their anxious watching of the weather. If it should break before they had made Hout Bay and its shelter, then they would never make it at all.

The elderly engines of this obsolete picket-boat could give her seven knots at the most; and now, with the short sea coming out against them across Chapman's Bay, she was down to four and pitching badly into it, sending the spray flying over herself and the huddled men (for her little space below decks was filled with their blankets and store). That spray was nearly as cold as it would have been in the Antarctic itself—for northwards along this western coast runs a current that comes from the Antarctic; and it is very little warmed by its long journey.

"Should do it, I think," said Dane; and Rattray nodded.

They crouched together in the half-protected steering-position, for'ard of the funnel.

"Only a couple of miles now," he added. "Another hour and we'll be in shelter. Tell the fellows. . . . How's the word going?"

"Give us the sternsheets and gratings now," came the message from Tyson, "and I'll have enough to take us in."

They had begun to burn the launch herself off Oliphant's Bosch, a blind bay a few miles back. No landing had been possible since they had rounded the Cape; and the wood they had cut in Buffels Bay had been insufficient. Now the good old teak was burning, and lasting well.

Dane nodded his satisfaction and permission, and crouched lower.

"Get hold of Tarrant, will you?" he

asked. "If he's fit I'll want him handy when we go in. He knows the place and I don't. The *Langford Hall's* charts don't show enough detail."

Rattray stumbled away with the message; then, having given it, settled himself again beside his leader and friend.

"Wonder what we'll find ashore *here?*" he asked gloomily.

"God knows!" was the answer—given in a tone that the men, or even the other officers and scientists, had never heard from him. "Frankly, I'm . . . frightened. It's as if we'd come to—an ended world. But no war could kill *every—*"

It's not only war that kills, Jack. It's what comes afterwards. And it doesn't only kill. Look at Carter. Look at his men. Once they were hand-picked from the best that England had. Look at 'em now. . . . What'll the rest be like? The civilians? With everything broken down—and the leaders in the cities and parliament houses wiped right out, maybe. It's likely enough.

"Didn't they tell us, over and over again, that the next war'd be an attack on the ordinary people—between whole nations? Frightfulness against frightfulness? But nobody could bomb or gas or torpedo *everything.* And it looks as if everything was—over—some time ago. . . . Then—where's all the ships? Where's all the people? Why was there nobody in Simonstown? If England couldn't send any one—surely there were our own South Africans to clear things up and start things going again?"

Dane remembered his own imaginings, on that first night in his cabin, when Carter had fainted on the settee.

"It's no use guessing," he said somberly.

"One can't *help* guessing—where there's nobody to *tell* us," answered the captain. "*This* is what gets me, Jack. . . . Here we are, on the edge of the world. Apart from its gold-mines, and Simonstown, we simply don't *matter.* We're not *important* enough to count. Nobody'd bother to attack us for our own sake. They'd only do it as part of a plan—a much *bigger* plan. . . . Simonstown only counts because its on the—the alternative trade-route—if Suez went. Otherwise they wouldn't even have bothered to attack there. But—aren't they occupying the place now? Why aren't our own South African forces there? Why isn't England there?"

Dane thought again of that mummified admiral, in the chair where perhaps he had waited, month after month, as they themselves had waited in the hut at Mills Bay, for the relief that had not come. Perhaps he had died of heartbreak. Or perhaps he had died in the first attack, like those men on the way back from their church-parade. . . .

"I don't . . . know," said Dane. "And it's no good guessing," he repeated, miserably. It was all he could do to think at all, to hold on to himself, keep himself up to his own immediate task, here at this wheel. "Damn it all, Skipper—we've only *seen* Simonstown!" he burst out. "A naval base. Naturally it got the brunt of—whatever *has* happened here—"

"Yes. We've only seen Simonstown. But Slangkop back there? Empty. No life at Buffels Bay. Nobody in Cape Point lighthouse. No ships. No trawlers, even. Only those little fishing boats off Agulhas. Colored people, the kind who've fished for years along the coast, *away from the big harbors.* But—everything's over now. I mean the war. Here, anyway. Then why hasn't anything started again?"

"It's no good—"

"But we've got to try and face the facts!"

"But we don't *know* the facts! There's been nobody to—"

"Then we've got to try and—think 'em out—for—"

The bows dug heavily into a black-green wall, white-crowned, and were wiped from sight in the spout of spray that came whipping aft on the keening wind. Both men ducked. The douche struck stingingly and passed, leaving the decks steaming.

"Piping *up!*" said Rattray warningly. "Better steer a bit closer in. Might get shelter from Chapman's Peak."

"Daren't go *too* close. Foul ground there, by the look of it. And there'll be a devil of a blast coming out along its wind'ard side. We'll have to cross that anyway—get over to the northern side o' the entrance. That'll be our first real shelter. . . . Oh, come *on,* you old cow!"—this to the dilapidated launch.

How could one think of what might have happened in the world, when he and his men were still fighting the elements for their own lives—with the sands of them fast running out?

THE engines chugged and clattered and clanked. Tyson dared not hurry them more. The unsafe boiler was already weeping out steaming hot water-drops along its corroded lower seams; here and there thin curls of steam had appeared at the upper one. The gauge showed ninety pounds; the water glass leaked hissingly; the condenser was a joke.

For an hour or more Tyson had been adding salt-water at the feed-well. And if the wretched old rattle trap broke down now, they would infallibly be swept southwest and away, into the empty Atlantic, with this wind. Lost in sight of their goal.

But Tyson tended his charges as a mother might tend her dying child. The kicking shaft and its loosened thrust-block were a-swim with oil. He had taken that lubricant from the *Langford Hall*. And even now, at times, he would mutter curses on the heads of naval men, who had used motor-oil on her, old and foul with metal and carbon and water-tapped from the engine-pumps of those cars, back in that Simonstown road.

"They *might* have scouted around the filling-stations," grumbled Tyson, engineer to the last. "Surely they could 'a' found a drum or two o' clean stuff *somewhere*. 'Tisn't as if a steam-engine wants *much*—but she does want it *good*. Listen to her! And who's to blame her, either? . . . No: I can't give you another revolution. Look at my boiler!" This to Dane, who had given Rattray the helm and come aft to ask.

"Suit yourself," was the answer, casual-seeming. "Personally I'd rather die quick—and warm—than out there to the sou'west and taking my time over it, without grub or water."

Tyson put his head up out of the little hatchway, took brief stock of the situation, and nodded.

"I get you," he said. "Ask the boys to gimme some more wood."

"That was all; and presently the *clank-a-clank* quickened a shade—the steam rose more thickly from the storehold-hatch.

Dane's heart ached for his men as he stood there, at the helm again beside Rattray, weighing their chances. Even if the scales came down now on the right side—what would they find in the bay here? Anything? They could not go on much longer. Some of them were down already. There was room below only for a very few of the weakest, and the wind and the spray were searching, would have chilled the warm blood of men well-fed and vigorous. It was like the boats over again, in those Westerlies.

How long could they keep sane? When hope went, sanity soon followed. He had a fear that at any moment some man might totter to his feet and let himself go overboard.

There were moments when he felt something within pleading with him to do just that, himself. . . .

For an hour the thing was in doubt, and the wind roared in anticipated victory, and the launch butted wearily and buried herself in each white-raging sea, so that waves burst over and deluged her, licking greedily along her sodden sides, gunwale-high and higher. She wallowed ever more sluggishly, for her steam-pump was worn out and so were her men: neither could ease her of her growing load of brine.

Then they began to feel the land's lee, Hangberg opened more and more, and Chapman's Peak grew vast above them and passed.

As Dane had feared, the blast of wind along the northern side whipped the water to rafales of white squalls which drove the launch bodily sideways and heeled her most drunkenly over. But she hammered and battled on, and the water grew calmer as she cleared the Peak astern. The broad entrance of Hout Bay opened its great arms to take her; and, as the last of the yellow glaring died from the western sky she passed in, steaming a great flurry of outcoming wind and spindrift and rain—harmless now, for the sea no longer had room to make.

And, with Tarrant advising him, and Rattray at his side, half-fainting, Dane veered her in towards the bowlder-beached northern side of that deep channel. She swung clattering past some outlying rocks, all in a smother of waving tentacles of brown kelp; and above them in the gloaming, pale against the dark mountainside of Hangberg, a cottage of wood and iron looked down, black-windowed, untenanted—but at least *whole*.

Then the shore tailed out into a low point of small stones and shingle, with a triangle of sandy grass-hummocks behind. Beyond it the bay opened to the nor'ard, wide and safe and girt about with high hills, nigh black in the darkling and cloaked with the thickening rain, their tops hidden by driving clouds.

Tarrant gestured weakly to the left again, and round the point came the voyagers, with slowing engines. There, in behind that outjutting tongue of low land, lay the hulk of a ship, an old wooden sailing-ship, grounded just off the shore. No war-murder, this: but a corpse of many years, beached here for a breakwater, behind whose slow-rotting bulk the fishermen could unload their cargoes from their motorboats—on the cannery-quay. And now they saw a tall thin chimney of iron, and some squat building about it; and—above those buildings, on the lower slopes of the Berg's inner flank, bowered in a blackness of trees and shrubs—a house.

And a window in that house was lighted.

"Manager's house," whispered Tarrant. "Steer in round the hulk and make fast 'longside the quay."

Dane swung her close around the stern of that ancient ship; and she passed in now to the narrow harbor-space between it and the dim-seen concrete shore-wall.

"Half astern!" said the little telegraph. She checked her way, bumped gently and stopped alongside.

IT WAS Meldrum who took her head-rope and dragged himself up to the quay—a climb of some two feet. As he reached the land there came a sudden clatter from the quay, as of a bucket that is dropped—and a light shone forth, a hurricane-lantern, held out at arm's length by a ghostly-looking figure in a long oilskin coat. And, in its other hand, something flashed and gleamed.

"Don't one of you move!" snapped a voice.

It was a cold voice, steely and firm, and quite implacable. None of them moved. They could not move. They were spellbound. It was the first time in two years that they had heard a woman's voice. . . .

"Listen to me," it continued with an utter sternness. "It's no good trying to sneak in here at night, either by land *or* sea. We're on the watch for your sort. I'm sick of you all! Go and grow your own food, like we're doing."

John Dane stared up at that inexorable vision as if paralyzed—as indeed, for a moment, he was. He had been seized by a nausea most dreadful, a despair of failure complete and final. He would have given much to have dropped where he was, and died, and be finished with everything. There was an actual mental impulse, terribly strong, to *throw* himself down, deliberately. It was like that prompting he had had before, at sea—to throw himself overside.

But—it would not do.

Here were his men, waiting, dying for the harborage that this woman denied them. Forcing his failing wits to action, he stood out from the wheel-shelter.

"Madam!" he managed to say. (It was somehow most difficult to get his lips and tongue to work now, and he spoke slowly and thickly.) "You have six shots . . . I suppose . . . in that pistol. There are . . . thirty-two of *us*. . . . No. . . . Six from thirty-two leaves . . . twenty-six. I'll be the first. We're starving and . . . desperate—"

"I can't help it. I'm very sorry for you. But I've heard the thing before. It's no good. We've only enough for ourselves here. Go away and grow food for *yourselves*. I'm sorry if you don't know how. Go and learn."

"You don't understand," groaned Dane heavily. "It's too late to tell us to go and grow food. We're too . . . far gone . . . or we would. . . . When we're straight again—we will . . . if that's what it's come to. . . . But there was . . . nowhere to grow . . . anything where we've been. . . . We're from the Antarctic . . . only just got back . . . two years down there . . . six months coming back. . . . I'm too tired . . . to talk straight . . . too tired. But—six from thirty-two . . . and I'll be the first of the six. But we don't stir from here. We can't. Go on . . . shoot if you must. But twenty-six of us . . . are coming ashore . . . somehow."

The woman hesitated, came to the quay-edge, set the lantern on the concrete, and looked down into the boat.

"You liar!" she said dispassionately. "Come from the Antarctic—in *that?*"

"By way of Simonstown," explained Dane, in the colorless voice of one too far gone to argue. He was leaning wearily on the waist-high wheel-shelter. "We got there by—oh, it's too long a story. . . . Got to believe me. . . . These are my men—except four—naval chaps we found. . . It's my job to—look after them. . . . I can only . . . repeat what I said . . . before. If—shooting *me* . . . is going to show you I'm telling you . . . the truth—well, go . . . ahead. I'm ready. I don't . . . care . . . any more."

A long silence. Dane felt a mounting longing to scream; but kept his teeth fast-locked. Though he did not move, he felt a swaying that was not the launch. The world was swaying.

Then:

"Who *are* you?" demanded the woman—and her voice had trembled.

"We're . . . the South African Antarctic . . . Exped . . . Ex. . . . What's left of us. . . . My name's . . . Dane. John D . . . a . . . n . . . e. . . ."

"Dane?"

It was a cry of amazement, of understanding, of remembrance, contrition; a cry for forgiveness, a promise of succor, a sobbing mingling of sorrow and gladness

In Dane's ears it rang like a trumpet, a trumpet of victory, for one to whom victory had seemed beyond all hope. Victory—*and* *release.* His long task was done. His men were safe.

Very slowly, but with a relaxation of surrender that was beyond all words to tell of, he let himself sink against the wheel-breasting, down and down, to an oblivion of utter peace.

THE next thing he knew, he was in a bare, wood-boarded room, in a bed—a real shore-bed, in which it was a marvel of contentment just to lie. He did not want to move. He did not want to think. Above all, he did not want to think.

"Drink this," said a voice—the voice that had spoken on the quay. But its tone was very different now. His head was gently lifted, a glass held to his lips. Hot milk. He drank—and slept again.

Either hours or days later he woke to full consciousness, raised himself and looked about him. There was one window in the room, with a glassed door beside it. Outside, all was a grayness of rain, and the roar of wind and sea, and a dim-seen mountain-side, visible over the palings of a fence, and a blur of white-streaked water between. Hout Bay entrance.

The room was very plainly furnished. There were a chest of drawers and a wash-stand, and a chair beside the bed. Opposite him, in another bed, lay a sleeping figure. Rattray. On the floor, along the wall opposite to the door, lay blankets, made up.

He felt much better. Vaguely he remembered having been half-awakened, several times, to drink hot milk. He was hungry now; but it was just an ordinary healthy hunger, not the gnawing agony that he had been through in the boats and aboard the *Langford Hall,* nor yet the weak, indifferent faintness, past all pangs, which had followed.

He sat up. Beyond a slight headache and a certain unfamiliarity in the movements of his own limbs, he felt quite well. Then memory came—and he lay back with a groan.

For Dane there had been no family left behind and none to be feared for—as Hay feared for his. He had no parents living, and he had been an only son. So, in the days of this home-coming, he had been all the more the prey of other thoughts and fears and imaginings. Preoccupied urgently with his own task as he had been, however, these thoughts had come unbidden, and often even despite himself; he had not been able to set himself deliberately to seek the truth of what had happened. But now, with his work apparently done, his men safe—at least for the present—his brain was free to envision, in awful, reiterated detail, the terrible sum of all that they had seen—aboard the ship, in Simonstown, and now here. He had seen and guessed (and heard, on that last night down at the fish-quay) enough to *compel* realization—of effect, if not of cause. There was no escape from the truth.

England—her rulers—the whole world—had been unprepared even for 1914. And the world had "progressed" very far since that half-forgotten day of calamity. There had at least been time, then, to build up the ramparts that should have been built before. And at least the Navy had been ready.

But—this time? What chance had there been to raise the walls of defense? What chance had the newer sciences of mass-murder, the newer theories of all-embracing, all-destroying warfare, terribly swift in sudden onslaught, allowed for any rallying? Had the cities had time, even, to queue-up for their gas-masks, before the death-cloud had settled on them from the sky?

And the ships? The merchant-ships that had carried the Empire's life-blood? Had Rattray been right, that day, on the bridge of the *Langford Hall?* Had they become even as she had been, when their boats had found her? What, under heaven, had there been to save them? The Navy? A skeleton, a mere police-force—as that word-drunk fool had exulted, over the wireless, that night down south, an aeon ago. A few air-craft-carriers, sent out beforehand to strategic points—as that minelayer had been sent out in '14. . . . By Heaven! Even ordinary merchantmen could have been used! A modern plane—an autogiro such as they should have had in the *Springbok*—could rise from the deck of almost any merchant-ship. Rattray had guessed that too.

If England's ships had gone—what of England? For a century now she had been using those ships to bring food to her ever-increasing people, from her half-empty Dominions—instead of taking her people, once and for all, to the food. But she had thought—the whole world had thought—that making motor-cars and wireless-sets was more important than growing food.

If there should be any England left, she must be paying for that mistake. But was there any England left to pay? Aircraft—and gas—could do terrible damage—irreparable damage—if the onset was secret and timed. And a surprise-attack it must have been, or the *Langford Hall* would have been warned of it, Simonstown would have been warned of it, those cruisers would never have been sunk in harbor, that pitiful column would not be lying unburied in the dockyard road, in the rags of their Sunday uniforms.

Aircraft had made surprise the one hope of war-makers—and also it had given them no alternative but destruction: military, naval, economic . . . unsparing . . . war on a whole people. Progress. Not as in the old days, when it had been tyrant against tyrant, each with his hired army. "Cripple utterly. Everything. Everywhere. Or they may do unto us as we do unto them, may recover from our blow, and fight on, and breed children to hate, and avenge their fathers." Logical. Quite. Scientific. A great advance on those crude old days when opposing leaders had doffed their hats to each other before the battle, each requesting the other to fire first. . . .

Yes. Surprise. Aircraft. Progress had rationalized and speed up everything—even its own ending.

A few oil-fields, a few coal-districts—undefended, indefensible, horribly vulnerable—bomb these, gas their specialist, irreplacable peoples; destroy also their encircling industries, factories, cities, railway-shops and yards, with *their* specialists, indispensable peoples; wreck the heart and nerve-centers: what happens? *Everything* stopped. Stopped dead. Or crawled about, stunned, futile. Like Carter in his steam-launch, burning his wood-fuel.

No coal or oil for the railways, motors, ships—such as the enemy had not destroyed at the first. Could the horse and the ox and the sure and the simple been everywhere long since strangled out of existence, almost, by the new and the complex? Now that their very complexity had caused the new things to cease, could the old things fill the breach again, take on the strain?

Transportation was civilization. Who had written that? Kipling. It was true. Everything had been specialized and separated, everywhere, even here in South Africa—and each had bred its specialist humans to tend and serve it. Civilization had become a vast number of scattered parts; a huge maze of machines, all needful to the whole, none able to work alone, each doing one little thing, useless by itself, all connected by a network of wires and belting. Transportation, communications, financial exchanges, Heaven knew what intricacies of mechanisms. Break the connections. . . .

BACK and forth, round and round grinding at the thing like a mill, his overburdened brain ran on. It would not stop. It could not stop.

Who—what—had begun it all?

Did it matter?

The enemy had failed, or the enemy would have been in Simonstown. Either England had hit back somehow after all—or the aggressors had been attacked by others, jealous of their success, fearful of what it might later portend for themselves. *That* was likely enough. Under its ostentatious surface of consultation and "good will," conference and co-operation, pact and leaguing, the whole world had really been a seething, ever-maneuvering hell of jealousy and suspicion and fear. Watching each other, like cats . . . like shopkeepers in the same street. Competition. It was all the same. And they had talked of outlawing war! As if one could cure the sores on a man's skin, ignoring the internal disease that caused them! You didn't *get* sores on clean bodies. . . .

So—had all the world been embroiled? It followed. Almost inevitably. Once *any one* started.

And then?

World-End.

The whole complex structure that the World had built upon the Earth—the whole great sprawling machine-shop of concrete and steel and wire and wheels, of wings and rails and transport, of industry and commerce and finance, in which all the world had lived and had its being: self-destroyed?

Hadn't they made it *too* complex; *too* clever and ingenious—and *delicate;* too much interlocked, too much patched and buttressed and propped with the opportunism of a moment's expediency? Hadn't everything depended too much on other things? When one really thought about it, *nothing* had stood by itself. It had been like a row of toy bricks, stood upright in a child's play. Knock down the end one, or *any* one. . . .

The more complex the machinery the more easily—and more completely—it could be broken down. Perhaps it would have broken down, of itself, in the end, even had there been no war. They had been getting to the point when the machinery was becoming so complex that soon it would not have worked at all—no one would have known how to *make* it work. . . . Perhaps they had gone too far to turn again, and simplify, and make straight. "You can't put the clock back." Then—if Man, in desperation, had *had* to burst his way out of the clogged maze he had made for himself—was he now fit to build in its place a saner and a simpler dwelling? Now that "progress" had ended itself (if it *had* truly ended itself); if the unregulated clock had jarred itself off the mantelpiece with the vibrations of its too-hasted speed—*what time was mankind keeping now?*

There were still the sun and the stars. But the World had shut itself *away* from the sun and the stars, preferring its own . . . "more efficient" . . . electric lamps. Had the World forgotten *how* to tell time from the sun and the stars?

He saw a pitiless vision, then, of civilization as it had been; as a refuge, a jerry-built "fortress," behind which mankind had cowered, in dread of the open earth to which they had all been born. What if the fortress had fallen? They had become as it were greenhouse-plants, reared behind glass of their own making. What if the greenhouse had been smashed in?

Then—the cold air of heaven was blowing in now, blowing in boisterously among the wreckage. What was happening to the plants? What was happening to the people who had been taught all their lives to believe that water came out of taps, that food grew in shops? . . . People who might or might not remember, at the close of an involved and extensive education, the names of the men who had killed Julius Caesar—but who did not know even a carrot when they saw it growing. . . . A world which had given its highest rewards to those who could amuse it, in mobs, from a screen in a darkened hall—but had made slaves of those who had fed it. . . . Specialist monomaniacs who could only sell what others had made, or design locomotives, or exploit for their own pockets the quarrels and misfortunes of others in the law-courts, or play football for a living, or add up the totals of the moneys that others made, or talk into telephones—all trained from youth to do one thing, and one thing *only*. . . . Yes, they had overdone their clever, progressive specialization. They should have learned first, all of them, to know and practice the simple, universal, really *needful* things.

"Go and grow food for yourselves. I'm sorry if you don't know how to do it. Go and *learn*."

Yes. Civilization had destroyed itself. He had brought his men back to the ruins.

HE HEARD footsteps' now, outside the closed door. It opened, and the woman came in. She took off her dripping oilskin coat; and at sight of him she brightened and came quickly forward.

"Oh—you're better!" she cried.

"Thank goodnes, yes," he answered, trying to smile. "And—thank *you!* I shan't forget—we shan't any of us forget. We were at our last gasp, you know. . . . How long have I been lying here? And—where are the others? Are they—all right?"

"You've been here nearly a week. In the bungalow. It was empty, and so we. . . . The cottage round the point, you know," she explained. "You must have seen it as you came in. 'Finis Terre,' it's called. Because it's the last house in the bay."

An ominous name.

"I think it was built a long time ago, for a summer cottage, by a man in Capetown. So they tell me here. . . . Most of the people lived on the other side of the bay, though, where the farms are. There's only the cannery, and the boats, and fishermen's houses, on this side. . . . This was the best we coud do for you. The men are using the big room at the end of the house. . . . We put you and the captain in here, with the doctor—Dr. Hay—because he wanted to keep near you. You two were the worst, you see. . . . The others say—the others say—it's because you never spared yourselves. . . . Oh, I've heard it all!" she hesitated, in response to his awkward movement of depracation. "It was *splendid*, the way you. . . ."

She was hesitating, *distrait*. Then she burst into a torrent of words.

"Oh, I've been so *sorry* for the things I said down there on the quay. I didn't know, then. How could I have known? I thought you were just—some more of them. . . ."

"Some more of them? How do you mean?" But already he knew.

"People who came crying and sneaking in to take our food. . . . We've had terrible trouble with them, for a long time, but it's been getting less lately. . . . Either they're learning, at last, to do as I keep telling them, and finding food for themselves, or—it doesn't bear thinking of, the other thing. But what else could I do? Something had to be done. If we hadn't come here, and stopped it, they'd have taken everything, and the people here—the people it *belonged* to—would have been left to starve. It wasnt' fair. Why should the people who've grown the food, the people it belongs to, have to starve because of others who just come and take it?

But that's what would have happened. I couldn't help it if the others didn't know how to—keep themselves. They were helpless enough *here*—"

Dane had a strong feeling of guilt. What about himself and *his* men suddenly thrown on this little settlement—a settlement that was struggling, in the midst of all this demoralized bewilderment, to keep itself alive?

"You remember what I said," he interrupted, "down there in the boat—about our shifting for ourselves? I meant it. I don't know what's happened to everything, but we aren't going to be a drag on anybody. We'll do all we—"

"You *are* doing," she broke in. "The others—your men—are helping tremendously, with everything, already. Between you all there doesn't seem to be *anything* you can't do! Even though you're none of you really—better—yet. I don't know what we do without you now—I don't know how we *did* do without you, before you came, my brother and I—"

Dane knitted his brows in thought. Who *was* this woman, and this brother of hers, who had somehow taken command here? At first he had thought she might be the wife or sister of the cannery manager, but —"if we hadn't come here and stopped it," she had said.

"You say you came here—from somewhere else? Will you tell me?"

"Yes. . . . You see, we were sailing—around the world—Fred and I. There were only the two of us, and the *Goblin,* and we'd always wanted to. She's a ketch, with a squares'l on the mainm'st for running. And we had a wireless receiving set for picking up time-signals, and news, and things like that. And—it's a queer thing—but the last thing we heard on it was about *you*—down south—your signals ending, and people worrying about what might have happened, and some talk about getting a relief-expedition together. After that we had bad weather, and we were busy with the boat, and didn't have time to turn on the wireless; so the next time we tuned in wasn't till nearly a week afterwards. And—there was just nothing. No broadcasting at all. Nothing but a lot of Morse, very faint. We knew *something* must have happened. But we couldn't guess what. So we headed for the nearest land—the Cape."

"If it had happened much earlier we'd have gone back to Punta Arenas. (We'd come through the Straits of Magellan, like Slocum did in the *Spray*. Fred had always wanted to.) And all the time the Morse signals got fainter and fewer, and we knew it must be something really terrible that had happened. We tried to get to land as quickly as we could, to find out. We'd been keeping just inside the Westerlies, and then slanted northeast for the Cape, expecting to have the southeast trade on the beam, but it wasn't very reliable and we took longer than we'd expected, and we somehow weren't either of us very well, and we didn't know what it was, and we couldn't shake it off. Fred thought it was nerves, and worry over what might have happened, but I don't know. . . ."

"Yes! Go on!" prompted Dane anxiously.

"Well, in the end we sighted the land just south of Dassen Island, and beat down-coast against a sou'wester for Table Bay. But when we go there we found Capetown all—burnt out and smashed, under a horrible sort of shimmery cloud; and a dreadful choking smell came from it, and we could see the ship in the docks, all sunk, and their masts sticking up all ways, and a big gray heap that Fred said had been the grain-elevator. So we couldn't land there, and the smell had made us feel worse. . . ."

Her mouth trembled. "We've never been —really well again—ever since."

The woman seemed faint. Dane waited. Then:

"You were telling me about the people here, when you came."

"Yes. . . . *How* can I tell you what they were like—what they're *still* like? . . . A sort of . . . helpless . . . hopelessness. They didn't seem able to think. They can't think now. We've got to think for them, Fred and I, and they do what we tell them, and they seem glad we're here to tell them—but it's hard to think, ourselves, about what's best to do. . . . Oh, it's all such an awful, hopeless *tangle!*"

Her hands clenched and unclenched. Dane half-rose in the bed, with sheer horror in his eyes. For in hers, for just a moment, he had seen something—a veiling—of that same glazed stare that was in Carter's, that same clouded dread he had seen before, after the earthquake in New Zealand. (*Why* did he keep remembering that earthquake, and those trembling, stricken people?)

SHE had calmed again now; and for the first time he really looked at her—with a heart-wrung pity, and a rage against all that had done this thing to her and all her kind. She was young and well-made, and her face was a shapely oval, clear-skinned, with a certain bloom of tan on it. She had blue eyes, very direct and fine, under dark brows; and chestnut hair, short and waving and loosely done. She wore a jumper of green wool, with a short skirt of some thick blue stuff, both old and mended.

And in that moment it was as though she stood before him for all the ordinary, decent, innocent folk who had been ruined and despoiled and demoralized—and infected with this gastly "sickness"—because some nation of bandits had wanted more than it had, wanted its way with the world . . . or because the world was mad and decadent anyway, had reached another of its blundering dead-ends, and had *had* to destroy itself. . . .

And now? Had the planet gone back to the jungle? Why else must she watch, with a pistol, for men who came to steal? Had the world ever really got away from the jungle? Hadn't the strong man always had to keep his house—armed—with a club, or a rifle, or battleships and aeroplanes, or—business acumen and hired legal cunning? Wasnt' it all the same, the whole thing? Having to guard what one had worked for —against those who would take it from one (because they either would not or could not work for their own) by force or trickery or stealth?

She must have seen it all in his face, for she seemed to stiffen, to pull herself together. And she blushed with a sudden shame.

"Oh!" she cried out. "I could kill myself! Here are you, worn out, needing rest and help and quiet—and I go piling *our* troubles on you, on top of your own. I've even forgotten that you must be hungry—"

"You've taken *my* troubles *off* me," he reassured her gently. "And I'd forgotten about being hungry. That can wait—I want to *know*. You're the first one who's been able to tell me *anything* that I can make head or tail of. For God's sake go on. . . . What did you find when you got here? Tell me more about the people—"

"Some of them have died," she went on draggingly. "A sort of fog had come over the mountains one day, with a southeaster —it was a Sunday morning. It killed a good many, and made every one else ill. So they say. And—they'd heard explosions, a long way off. *Before* the fog had come. A little time before. In the morning, I think."

"Simonstown and Muizenberg and the False Bay coast being bombed," he said. "I know. The fog would be the gas—diluted, or it would have killed everybody. . . ."

He paused, sitting very still in the bed, his face drawn with a sickened, disgusted fury. Was this "sickness" something more than just the "after-effect" of gas-poisoning?

Had there been something *else in* the gas, or with it?

"And then—the people who were still alive, when you got here?" he asked her.

"Sort of—trying to go on with things—in a dazed kind of way. A useless, *stupid* way. How can I tell you—make you understand? . . . Listen! The fishermen—going out as usual, using the engines in their boats—they run on paraffin. They were using up the paraffin, although they do have sails on their boats and they sail quite well—because they'd always used their engines and it was easier. They never thought they mightn't be able to get any more paraffin when they'd finished what was in the store here. . . . We stopped that. We had to stop it. . . . The cannery was the same—going on cooking and canning the crawfish the boats caught, using up all the coal. . . . Just trying to go on with things," she repeated. "Every one was trying to go on with what they'd been doing before. Waste and muddle. As if they'd all gone mad."

Like machines, thought Dane, dreadfully. Machines running on, and running *down*.

"No one seemed to have any idea of taking real charge of anything. They were waiting for some one else to come and tell them what to do—the government, or *somebody*. And there isn't any government left—there can't be. . . . The only *policeman* left here—the other one died in the fog—he's got the sickness too. . . ."

"What about the farmers?" asked Dane. "Surely *they*—"

"Over on the other side of the bay. And up towards Constantia Nek. Yes. It's nearly all wine-farms the other side of the Pass, but we don't go there. We don't go beyond the Nek. I put the policeman there, to stop people coming in to steal by the road. . . ."

She broke off, began again.

"The farmers . . . they were going on with their lucerne and potatoes and milk and poultry-farming and vegetables—and letting half of it go bad because there was no bus any more to take it to Capetown or

Plumstead or Wynberg market, nobody to *sell* it to, and money no use if there had been—nothing in the shop to spend it on. . . .

"So—we had to try and take charge. My brother and I. *We* had to have food too, you see. . . . But it's so hard to explain. It's so hard to *think*. . . ."

As he looked at her trembling lips and twitching hands the beginning of a great determination was born within him, mingling itself with a wordless prayer for guidance and help. Lonely and ill and desperate herself, faced suddenly by things unfamiliar, unprecedented, undreamed-of, she had somehow struggled to answer a cry for help from others—who needed help even more than she. And on top of that she had received him also, and fed and nursed him and his men back from the gates that they had so nearly approached, easing away from his worn-out body and brain the load whose killing weight he had had to bear so long. And now, instinctively, despite herself, perhaps even unconscious of her own appeal, she was begging him to take this other burden, her own burden that had been thrust on her here, in its place.

And already it had begun to fasten itself to his shoulders. Inevitably it had been done so, from the moment he had headed the launch in through the entrance. It would have come upon him just the same, wherever he had steered. It was heavier than he could guess, even now—though very soon he was to feel the full, crushing weight of it. But now, all he could tell himself was that "it was up to him." For the sake of his own men, for his own sake, apart from this girl and her "people"—just as it had been for her and her brother, when they themselves had sailed in here—it was up to him.

There was a sound of footsteps on the cement veranda outside.

"Here's the doctor!" she cried. "And I must go. I must tell them in the kitchen that you're awake. . . ."

Hay's figure appeared in semi-silhouette against the rainy dullness outside the glass door. He came in, with a little nod for the woman, who went out. He was looking gray and haggard, but with more than bodily strain. There was a whole tragedy of grief in his eyes.

He had found a bicycle two days before, and ridden painfully on it along the neglected sea road, over Hout Bay Nek and along the steep moutainside-slope of the Twelve Apostles, to Camp's Bay and Sea Point and Capetown—seeking drugs and instruments, and that firsthand knowledge of the truth which he could no longer bear to guess, and—what might be left of his home up in the Gardens. He had not found very much of it. Under its heaped ruins, he had to suppose, lay the bones of his wife and daughters. It was a marvel that he had come back sane.

But he had found much of the other things he had sought, bringing back what he could, leaving the rest in a "depot," to be brought in later.

HE MADE no reference to that journey now. It was over. It was all over. Everything was over, thought Doctor Hay. . . .

He just grunted, made a quick examination of the sleeping Rattray; grunted again, and came over to Dane.

"You overdid it," he said, gruffly. "Don't think I don't know why. Let's have a look at you. . . . H'm. You're all right now. You don't deserve to be. You can get up."

"If it hadn't been for these two—that girl and her brother," said Dane, "as far as I can see we'd have been—no better off than we were in Simonstown. It's a miracle. The two of them between them, with their sailor's way of doing things."

"That's right. So she's told you they were over two hundred miles from land? Yet they did not escape entirely. And that's the point—the whole damnable *point?*" said Hay, his voice rising jerkily.

Dane was thinking, hesitant. Then:

"Look here, Doc, what *is* this 'sickness'? Do you know? Have you got any idea?"

"I can't swear to what it *is* yet. Not to what *caused* it, I mean. But I've got a pretty clear idea of what sort of thing it *must* have been. You remember the influenza of 1918? At the end of *that* war? A lot of people thought it *wasn't* influenza, but something else. Something *new*. Something in the air. Because people caught it in all sorts of places, right away from any ordinary source of infection. Well, what *was* in the air? Gas—explosives-gas, poison gas. Four years of corruption from the fighting fronts. Carried all over the world by the winds and the wind-systems. . . ."

"Then why didn't we get it, down there, in the Antarctic? Why don't we get it now?" demanded Dane again.

"That's the last proof," answered the doctor with solemn precision. "*We* were in the Antarctic. If it was a germ, the cold killed it, or kept it harmless. You don't get germ-diseases down south. If it wasn't a germ, but something in suspension, the cold must have condensed it. And we don't catch it now because it's dissipated. Otherwise we'd have got it on our way north long ago. It's over—done its work now. What these people have got are the after-effects. I've been watching them, and listening to them. Brain half-paralyzed, *especially the high centers*. And Meldrum thinks there may be something gone wrong in the glands—to account for the periodic collapse, and the coma afterwards, and the ghastly depression they felt—like the influenza-depression, only ten times worse."

"But this girl—Miss Beattie—"

"She and her brother were at sea, remember. They had an exceptionally mild dose. And the way they'd been living—in the clean sea air—that helped them too. There may be others like them, scattered about here and there, trying to carry on—but they're *all* affected more or less. All looking to some one *else* to take charge . . . and start things going again."

"Then—"

He paused; for he could not find the words.

"Yes?"

It was almost a whisper. For Dane could see what was coming.

"In the meantime," came the voice of Rattray, very grim and quiet now: *"are we the only sane people left on earth!"*

And they both looked at John Dane.

"No! *No*!" shrieked his whole soul within him; for it had shrunk in upon itself, and strove in desperation to throw off the burden—that burden already fastened. For he knew now that *this* was the awful, inescapable purpose which had spared them from the Antarctic ice, snatched them alive from the heavens-high heave of the Westerlies, to bring them here—ring-fenced a hundred times from death on their way—to find, and know, and serve.

Service unbearable, monstrous; a task for titans, for gods—not men. But—if there was no one else, none but himself, and his men; these men, who looked to him; the Expedition? Even Carter and those seamen of his had come to realize somehow, even in *their* darkened minds, that they must look to him. Even that girl, that poor, struggling girl, had tried not to fail those who had looked to her....

He stood there, staring back at these two who waited; and for a moment his face was that of a child, little and fearful, and very lonely—and awed. A child in the midst of cosmic ruins, to whom suddenly a voice had spoken, saying:

"Build again—and build better!"

At last he spoke.

"Where are the others?" he asked faintly, unsteadily.

Then, not waiting for answer, he went to Rattray, and bent down, and put a hand on the shoulder of his friend.

"On your feet again, Skipper—as soon as you can. . . . It seems we've got work to do."

His voice was strong now, and firm, and ringing with a strange exaltation.

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AT THE FARMHOUSE

Carefully he planned his perfect crime, so no trace of tangible evidence could possibly remain. That the flaw might be intangible never entered his mind. . . .

THE dusk of a November day was falling fast when John Aylsford came out of his lodging in the cobbled street and started to walk briskly along the road which led eastwards by the shore of the bay. He had been at work while the daylight served him at his painting, and now, when the gathering darkness weaned him from his easel, he was accustomed to go out for air and exercise and cover half a dozen miles before he returned to his solitary supper.

To-night there were but few folk abroad, and those scudded along before the strong southwesterly gale which had roared and raged all day, or leaning forward, beat their way against it. No fishing-boats had put forth on that maddened sea, but they had lain moored behind the quay-wall, tossing uneasily with the backwash of the great breakers that swept by the pier-head. The tide was low now, and they rested on the sandy beach, black blots against the smooth wet surface which sombrely reflected the last flames in the west. The sun had gone down in a wrack of broken and flying clouds, angry and menacing with promise of a wild night.

For many days past, at this hour John Aylsford had started eastwards for his tramp along the rough coast road by the bay. The last high tide had swept shingle and sand over sections of it, and fragments of seaweed, driven by the wind, bowled along the ruts.

The heavy boom of the breakers sounded sullenly in the dusk, and white towers of foam appearing and disappearing showed how high they leaped over the reefs of rock beyond the headland. For half a mile or so, slanting himself against the gale he pursued this road, then turned up a narrow muddy lane sunk deep between the banks on either side of it. It ran steeply uphill, dipped down again, and joined the main road inland.

Having arrived at the junction, John Aylsford went eastwards no more, but turned his steps to the west, arriving, half an hour after he had set out, on top of the hill above the village he had quitted, though five minutes' ascent would have taken him from his lodgings to the spot where he now stood looking down on the scattered lights below him. The wind had blown all wayfarers indoors, and now in front of him the road that crossed this high and desolate tableland, sprinkled here and there with lonely cottages and solitary farms, lay empty and greyly glimmering in the wind-swept darkness, not more than faintly visible.

Many times during this past month had John Aylsford made this long detour, starting eastwards from the village and coming back by a wide circuit, and now, as on these other occasions, he paused in the black shelter of the hedge through which the wind hissed and whistled, crouching there in the shadow as if to make sure

By E. F. Benson

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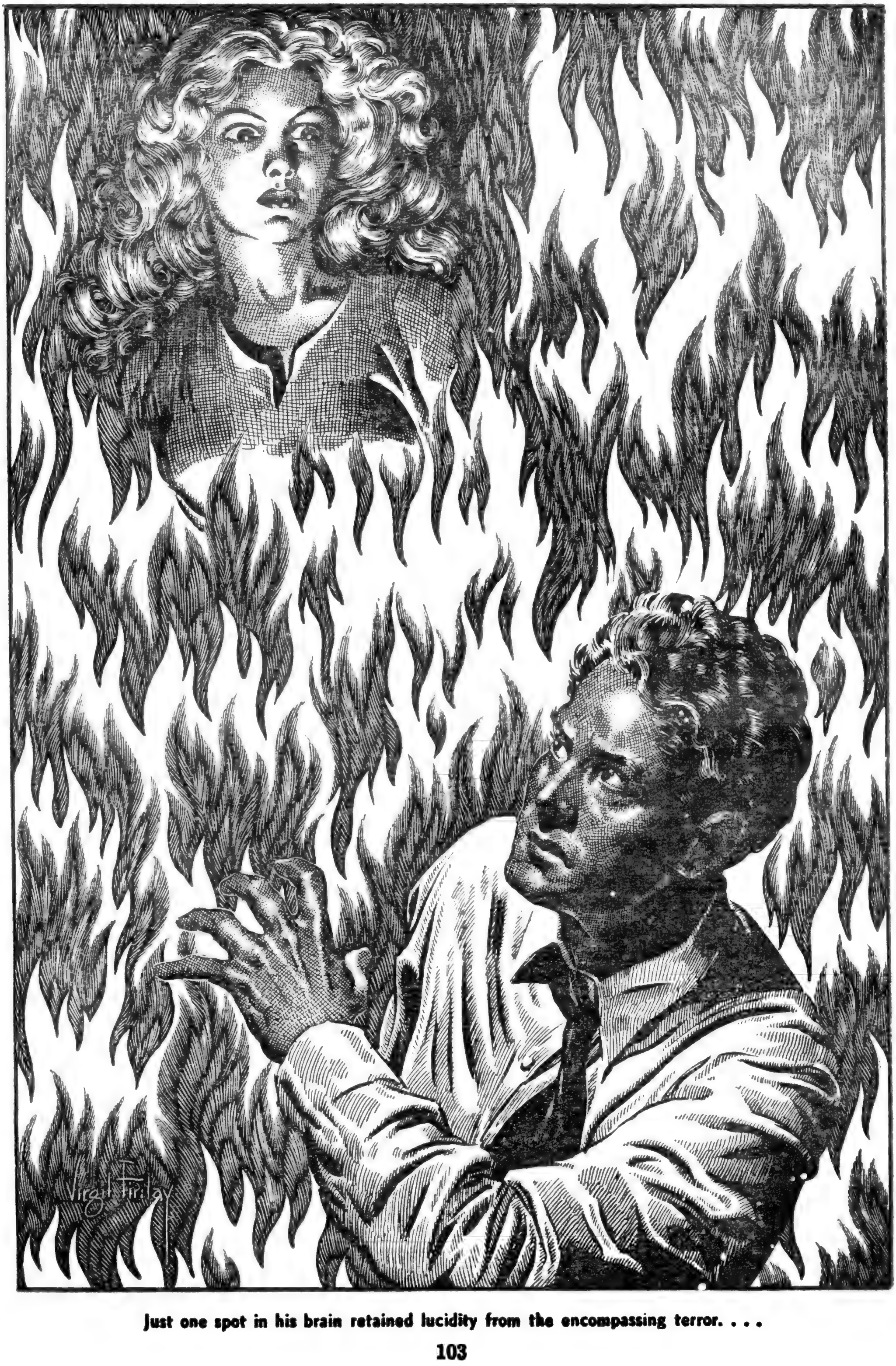
Virgil Finlay

Just one spot in his brain retained lucidity from the encompassing terror. . . .

that none had followed him, and that the road in front lay void of passengers, for he had no mind to be observed by any on these journeyings. And as he paused he let his hate blaze up, heartening him for the work the accomplishment of which alone could enable him to recapture any peace or profit from life.

To-night he was determined to release himself from the millstone which for so many years had hung round his neck, drowning him in bitter waters. From long brooding over the idea of the dead, he had quite ceased to feel any horror of it. The death of that drunken woman was not a matter for qualms or uneasiness; the world would be well rid of her, and he more than well.

No spark of tenderness for the handsome fishergirl who once had been his model and for twenty years had been his wife pierced the blackness of his purpose. Just here it was that he had seen her first when on a summer holiday he had lodged with a couple of friends in the farmhouse towards which his way now lay. She was coming up the hill with the late sunset gilding her face, and, breathing quickly from the ascent, had leaned on the wall close by with a smile and a glance for the young man. She had sat to him, and the autumn brought the sequel to the summer in his marriage.

He had bought from her uncle the little farmhouse where he had lodged, adding to its modest accommodation a studio and a bedroom above it, and there he had seen the flicker of what had never been love, die out, and over the cold ashes of its embers the poisoned lichen of hatred spread fast.

Early in their married life she had taken to drink, and had sunk into a degradation of soul and body that seemed bottomless, dragging him with her, down and down, in the grip of a force that was hardly human in its malignity.

Often during the wretched years that followed he had tried to leave her; he had offered to settle the farm on her and make adequate provision for her. But she had clung to the possession of him, but for a reason exactly opposite, namely, that her hatred of him fed and glutted itself on the sight of his ruin.

It was as if, in obedience to some hellish power, she set herself to spoil his life, his powers, his possibilities, by tying him to herself. And by the aid of that power, so sometimes he had thought, she enforced her will on him, for, plan as he might to cut the whole dreadful business and leave the wreck behind him, he had never been able to consolidate his resolve into action.

There, but a few miles away, was the station from which ran the train that would bear him out of this ancient western kingdom, where the beliefs in spells and superstitions grew rank as the herbage in that soft enervating air, and set him in the dry hard light of cities. The way lay open, but he could not take it; something unseen and potent, of grim inflexibility, held him back. . . .

HE HAD passed no one on his way here, and satisfied now that in the darkness he could proceed without fear of being recognized if a chance wayfarer came from the direction in which he was going, he left the shelter of the hedge, and struck out into the stormy sea of that stupendous gale. Even as a man in the grip of imminent death sees his past life spread itself out in front of him for his final survey before the book is closed, so now, on the brink of the new life from which the deed on which he was determined alone separated him, John Alysford, as he battled his advance through this great tempest, turned over page after page of his own wretched chronicles, feeling already strangely detached from them. It was as if he read the sordid and enslaved annals of another, wondering at them, and half-pitying, half-despising him who had allowed himself to be bound so long in this ruinous noose.

Yes; it had been just that, a noose drawn ever tighter round his neck, while he choked and struggled all unavailingly. But there was another noose which should very soon now be drawn rapidly and finally tight, and the drawing of that in his own strong hands would free him. As he dwelt on that for a moment, his fingers stroked and patted the hank of whipcord that lay white and tough in his pocket. A noose, a knot drawn quickly taut, and he would have paid her back with justice and swifter mercy for the long strangling which he had suffered.

Voluntarily and eagerly at the beginning had he allowed her to slip the noose about him, for Ellen Trenair's beauty in those days, so long past and so everlastingly regretted, had been enough to ensnare a man. He had been warned at the time, by hint and half-spoken suggestion, that it was ill for a man to mate with a girl of that dark and ill-famed family, or for a woman to wed a boy in whose veins ran the blood of Jonas Trenair, once Methodist preacher, who learned on one All-Hallows' Eve a darker gospel than he had ever preached before.

What had happened to the girls who had married into that dwindling family, now all but extinct? One, before her marriage was a year old, had gone off her head, and now, a withered and ancient crone, mowed and gibbered about the streets of the village, picking garbage from the gutter and munching it in her toothless jaws. Another, Ellen's own mother, had been found hanging from the banister of her stairs, stark and grim. Then there was young Frank Pencarris, who had wed Ellen's sister. He had sunk into an awful melancholy, and sat tracing on sheets of paper the visions that beset his eyes, headless shapes, and foaming mouths, and the images of the spawn of hell. . . .

John Aylsford, in those early days, had laughed to scorn these old-wife tales of spells and sorceries: they belonged to ages long past, whereas fair Ellen Trenair was of the lovely present, and had lit longing in his heart which she alone could assuage. He had no use, in the brightness of her eye, for such shadows and superstitions: her beams dispelled them.

Bitter and black as midnight had his enlightenment been, darkening through dubious dusks till the murk of the pit itself enveloped him. His laughter at the notion that in this twentieth century spells and sorceries could survive, grew silent on his lips. He had seen the cattle of a neighbour who had offended one whom it was wiser not to cross, dwindle and pine, though there were rich pastures for their grazing, till the rib bones stuck out like the timbers of stranded wrecks. He had seen the spring on another farm run dry at lambing-time because the owner, sceptic like himself, had refused that bounty, which all prudent folk paid to the wizard of Mareuth, who, like Ellen, was of the blood of Jonas Trenair.

From scorn and laughter he had wavered to an uneasy wonder, and from wonder his mind had passed to the conviction that there were powers occult and terrible which strove in darkness and prevailed, secrets and spells that could send disease on man and beast, dark incantations, known to few, which could maim and cripple, and of these few his wife was one.

His reason revolted, but some conviction, deeper than reason, held its own. To such a view it seemed that the deed he contemplated was no crime, but rather an act of obedience to the ordinance, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." And the sense of detachment was over that, even as over the memories that oozed up in his mind. Somebody—not he—who had planned everything very carefully was in the next hour going to put an end to his bondage.

So the years had passed, he floundering ever deeper in the slough into which he was plunged, out of which while she lived he could never emerge. For the last year, she, wearying of his perpetual presence at the farm, had allowed him to take a lodging in the village. She did not loose her hold over him, for the days were few on which she did not come with demands for a handful of shillings to procure her the raw spirits which alone could slake her thirst.

Sometimes as he sat at work there in the north room looking on to the small garden-yard, she would come lurching up the path, with her bloated crimson face set on the withered neck, and tap at his window with fingers shrivelled like a bird's claws. Body and limbs were no more than bones over which the wrinkled skin was stretched, but her face bulged monstrously with layers of fat.

He would give her whatever he had about him, and if it was not enough, she would plant herself there, grinning at him and wheedling him, or with screams and curses threatening him with such fate as he had known to overtake those who crossed her will. But usually he gave her enough to satisfy her for that day and perhaps the next, for thus she would the more quickly drink herself to death. Yet death seemed long in coming. . . .

HE REMEMBERED well how first the notion of killing her came into his head, just a little seed, small as that of mustard, which lay long in barrenness. Only the bare idea of it was there, like an abstract proposition. Then imperceptibly in the fruitful darkness of his mind, it must have begun to sprout, for presently a tendril, still soft and white, prodded out into the daylight. He almost pushed it back again, for fear that she, by some divining art, should probe his purpose. But when next she came for supplies, he saw no gleam of surmise in her bleary eyes, and she took her money and went her way, and his purpose put forth another leaf, and the stem of it grew sappy. All autumn through it had flourished, and grown tree-like, and fresh ideas, fresh details, fresh precautions, flocked there like building birds and made it gay with singing. He sat under the shadow of it and listened with brightening hopes to their song; never had there been such peerless melody. They knew their tunes now, there was no need for any further rehearsal.

He began to wonder how soon he would be back on the road again, with face turned from this buffeting wind, and on his way home. His business would not take him long; the central deed of it would be over in a couple of minutes, and he did not anticipate delay about the setting to work on it, for by seven o'clock of the evening, as well he knew, she was usually snoring in the oblivion of complete drunkenness, and even if she was not as far gone as that, she would certainly be incapable of any serious resistance. After that, a quarter of an hour more would finish the job, and he would leave the house secure already from any chance of detection.

Night after night during these last ten days he had been up here, peering from the darkness into the lighted room where she sat, then listening for her step on the stairs as she stumbled up to bed, or hearing her snorings as she slept in her chair below. The outhouse, he knew, was well stocked with paraffin; he needed no further apparatus than the whipcord and the matches he carried with him. Then back he would go along the exact route by which he had come, re-entering the village again from the eastwards, in which direction he had set out.

This walk of his was now a known and established habit; half the village during the last week or two had seen him every evening set forth along the coast road, for a tramp in the dusk when the light failed for his painting, and had seen him come back again as they hung about and smoked in the warm dusk, a couple of hours later. None knew of his detour to the main road which took him westwards again above the village and so to the stretch of bleak upland along which now he fought his way against the gale.

Always round about the hour of eight he had entered the village again from the other side, and had stopped and chatted with the loiterers. Tonight, no later than was usual, he would come up the cobbled road again, and give "good night" to any who lingered there outside the public-house. In this wild wind it was not likely that there would be such, and if so, no matter; he had been seen already setting forth on his usual walk by the coast of the bay, and if none outside saw him return, none could see the true chart of his walk.

By eight he should be back to his supper, there would be a soused herring for him, and a cut of cheese, and the kettle would be singing on the hob for his hot whisky-toddy. He would have a keen edge for the enjoyment of them to-night; he would drink long healths to the damned and the dead. Not till tomorrow, probably, would the news of what had happened reach him, for the farmhouse lay lonely and sheltered by the wood of firs. However high might mount the beacon of its blazing, it would scarcely, screened by the tall trees, light up the western sky, and be seen from the village nestling below the steep hill-crest.

By now John Aylsford had come to the fir wood which bordered the road on the left, and, as he passed into its shelter, cut off from him the violence of the gale. All its branches were astir with the sound of some vexed, overhead sea, and the trunks that upheld them creaked and groaned in the fury of the tempest. Somewhere behind the thick scud of the flying clouds the moon must have risen, for the road glimmered more visibly, and the tossing blackness of the branches was clear enough against the grey tumult overhead. Behind the tempest she rode in serene skies, and in the murderous clarity of his mind he likened himself to her.

Just for half an hour more he would still grope and scheme and achieve in this hurly-burly, and then, like a balloon released, soar through the clouds and find serenity. A couple of hundred yards now would take him round the corner of the wood: from there the miry lane led from the high-road to the farm.

HE HASTENED rather than retarded his going as he drew near, for the wood, though it roared with the gale, began to whisper to him of memories. Often in that summer before his marriage had he strayed out at dusk into it, certain that before he had gone many paces he would see a shadow flitting towards him through the firs, or hear the crack of dry twigs in the stillness. Here was their tryst; she would come up from the village with the excuse of bringing fish to the farmhouse, after the boats had come in, and deserting the high-road make a short cut through the wood.

Like some distant blink of lightning the memory of those evenings quivered distantly on his mind, and he quickened his step. The years that followed had killed and buried those recollections, but who knew what stirring of corpses and dry bones might not yet come to them if he lingered there? He fingered the whipcord in his pocket, and launched out, beyond the trees, into the full fury of the gale.

The farmhouse was near now and in full view, a black blot against the clouds. A beam of light shone from an uncurtained window on the ground-floor, and the rest was dark. Even thus had he seen it for many nights past, and well knew what sight would greet him as he stole up nearer. And even so it was to-night, for there she sat in the studio he had built, betwixt table and fireplace with the bottle near her, and her withered hands stretched out to the blaze, and the huge bloated face swaying on her shoulders. Beside her to-night were the wrecked remains of a chair, and the first sight that he caught of her was to show her feeding the fire with the broken pieces of it. It had been too troublesome to bring fresh logs from the store of wood; to break up a chair was the easier task.

She stirred and sat more upright, then reached out for the bottle that stood beside her, and drank from the mouth of it. She drank and licked her lips and drank again, and staggered to her feet, tripping on the edge of the hearthrug. For a moment that seemed to anger her, and with clenched teeth and pointing finger she mumbled at it; then once more she drank, and, lurching forward, took the lamp from the table. With it in her hand she shuffled to the door, and the room was left to the flickering firelight. A moment afterwards, the bedroom window above sprang into light, an oblong of bright illumination.

As soon as that appeared he crept round the house to the door. He gently turned the handle of it, and found it unlocked. Inside was a small passage entrance, on the left of which ascended the stairs to the bedroom above the studio. All was silent there, but from where he stood he could see that the door into the bedroom was open, for a shaft of light from the lamp she had carried up with her was shed on to the landing there. . . . Everything was smoothing itself out to render his course most easy. Even the gale was his friend, for it would be bellows for the fire. He slipped off his shoes, leaving them on the mat, and drew the whipcord from his pocket. He made a noose in it, and began to ascend the stairs. They were well-built of seasoned oak, and no creak betrayed his advancing footfall.

At the top he paused, listening for any stir of movement within, but there was nothing to be heard but the sound of heavy breathing from the bed that lay to the left of the door and out of sight. She had thrown herself down there, he guessed, without undressing, leaving the lamp to burn itself out. He could see it through the open door already beginning to flicker; on the wall behind it were a couple of water-colours, pictures of his own, one of the little walled garden by the farm, the other of the pinewood of their tryst.

Well he remembered painting them: she would sit by him as he worked, with prattle and singing. He looked at them now quite detachedly; they seemed to him wonderfully good, and he envied the artist that fresh, clean skill. Perhaps he would take them down presently and carry them away with him.

Very softly now he advanced into the room, and, looking round the corner of the door, he saw her, sprawling and fully dressed on the broad bed. She lay on her back, eyes closed and mouth open, her dull grey hair spread over the pillow. Evidently she had not made the bed that day, for she lay stretched on the crumpled back-turned blankets. A hair-brush was on the floor beside her; it seemed to have fallen from her hand. He moved quickly towards her.

HE PUT on his shoes again when he came to the foot of the stairs, carrying the lamp with him and the two pictures which he had taken down from the wall, and went into the studio. He set the lamp on the table and drew down the blinds, and his eye fell on the half-empty whisky bottle from which he had seen her drinking. Though his hand was quite steady and his mind composed and tranquil, there was yet at the back of it some impression that was slowly developing, and a good dose of spirits would no doubt expunge that.

He drank half a tumbler of it raw and undiluted, and though it seemed no more than water in his mouth, he soon felt that it was doing its work and sponging away from his mind the picture that had been outlining itself there. In a couple of minutes he was quite himself again, and could afford to wonder and laugh at the illusions, for it was no less than that, which had been gaining on him. For though he could distinctly remember drawing the noose tight, and seeing the face grow black, and struggling with the convulsive movement of those withered limbs that soon lay quiet again, there had sprung up in his mind some unaccountable impression that what he had left there huddled on the bed was not just the bundle of withered limbs and strangled neck, but the body of a young girl, smooth of skin and golden of hair, with mouth that smiled drowsily.

She had been asleep when he came in, and now was half-awake, and was stirring and stretching herself. In what dim region of his mind that image had formed itself, he had no idea; all he cared about now was that his drink had shattered it again, and he could proceed now with order and method to make all secure. Just one drop more first; how lucky it was that this morning he had been liberal with his money when she came to the village, for he would have been sorry to have gone without that fillip to his nerves.

He looked at his watch, and saw to his satisfaction that it was still only a little after seven o'clock. Half an hour's walking, with this gale to speed his steps, would easily carry him from door to door, round the detour which approached the village from the east, and a quarter of an hour, so he reckoned, would be sufficient to accomplish thoroughly what remained to be done here.

He must not hurry and thus overlook some precaution needful for his safety, though, on the other hand, he would be glad to be gone from the house as soon as might be, and he proceeded to set about his work without delay. There was brushwood and fire-kindling to be brought in from the woodshed in the yard, and he made three journeys, returning each time with his arms full, before he had brought in what he judged to be sufficient. Most of this he piled in a loose heap in the studio; with the rest he ascended once more to the bedroom above and made a heap of it there in the middle of the floor. He took the curtains down from the windows, for they would make a fine wick for the paraffin, and stuffed them into the pile. Before he left, he looked again at what lay on the bed, and marvelled at the illusion which the whisky had dispelled, and as he looked, the sense that he was free mounted and bubbled in his head. The thing seemed scarcely human at all; it was a monster from which he had delivered himself, and now, with the thought of that to warm him, he was no longer eager to get through with his work and be gone, for it was all part of that act of riddance which he had accomplished, and he gloried in it. Soon, when all was ready, he would come back once more and soak the fuel and set light to it, and purge with fire the corruption that lay humped on the bed.

The fury of the gale had increased with nightfall, and as he went downstairs again he heard the rattle of loosened tiles on the roof, and the crash as they shattered themselves on the cobbles of the yard. At that a sudden misgiving made his breath catch in his throat, as he pictured to himself some blast falling on the house and crashing in the walls that now trembled and shuddered. Supposing the whole house fell, even if he escaped with his life from the toppling ruin, what would his life be worth? There would be search made in the fallen débris to find the body of her who lay strangled with the whipcord round her neck, and he pictured to himself the slow, relentless march of justice. He had bought whipcord only yesterday at a shop in the village, insisting on its strength and toughness . . . would it be wiser now, this moment, to untie the noose and take it back with him or add it to his brushwood? . . .

He paused on the staircase, pondering that; but his flesh quaked at the thought, and master of himself though he had been during those few struggling minutes, he distrusted his power of making himself handle once more that which could struggle no longer. But even as he tried to screw his courage to this point, the violence of the squall passed, and the shuddering house braced itself again. He need not fear that; the gale was his friend that would blow on the flames, not his enemy. The blasts that trumpeted overhead were the voices of allies come to aid him.

All was arranged then upstairs for the pouring of the paraffin and the lighting of the pyre; it remained but to make similar dispositions in the studio. He would stay to feed the flames till they raged beyond all power of extinction; and now he began to plan the line of his retreat. There were two doors in the studio: one by the fireplace which opened on to the little garden; the other gave into the passage entrance from which mounted the stairs and so to the door through which he had come into the house. He decided to used the garden-door for his exit; but when he came to open it, he found that the key was stiff in the rusty lock, and did not yield to his efforts. There was no use in wasting time over that; it made no difference through which door he finally emerged, and he began piling up his heap of wood at the end of the room.

The lamp was burning low; but the fire, which only a few minutes ago she had fed with a broken chair, shone brightly, and a flaming ember from it would serve to set light to his conflagration. There was a straw mat in front of it, which would make fine kindling, and with these two fires, one in the bedroom upstairs and the other here, there would be no mistake about the incineration of the house and all that it contained.

His own crime, if crime it was, would perish, too, and all evidence thereof, victim and whipcord, and the very walls of the house of sin and hate. It was a great deed and a fine adventure, and as the liquor he had drunk began to circulate more buoyantly through his veins, he gloried at the thought of the approaching consummation. He would slip out of the sordid tragedy of his past life, as from a discarded garment that he threw into the bonfire he would soon kindle.

ALL was ready now for the soaking of the fuel he had piled with the paraffin, and he went out to the shed in the yard where the barrel stood. A big tin ewer stood beside it, which he filled and carried indoors. That would be sufficient for the soaking of the pile upstairs, and, fetching the smoky and flickering lamp from the studio, he went up again, and like a careful gardener watering some bed of choice blossoms, he sprinkled and poured till his ewer was empty. He gave but one glance to the bed behind him, where the huddled thing lay so quietly, and as he turned, lamp in hand, to go down again, the draught that came in through the window against which the gale blew, extinguished it. A little blue flame of burning vapour rose in the chimney and went out; so, having no further use for it, he pitched it on to the pile of soaked material. As he left the room he thought he heard some small stir of movement behind him, but he told himself that it was but something slipping in the heap he had built there.

Again he went out into the storm. The clouds that scudded overhead were thinner now, though the gale blew not less fiercely, and the blurred, watery moonlight was brighter. Once for a moment, as he approached the shed, he caught sight of the full orb plunging madly among the streaming vapours; then she was hidden again.

Close in front of him were the fir trees of the wood where those sweet trysts had been held, and once again the vision of her as she had been broke into his mind and the queer conviction that it was no withered and bloated hag who lay on the bed upstairs but the fair, comely limbs and the golden head. It was even more vivid now, and he made haste to get back to the studio, where he would find the trusty medicine that had dispelled that vision before. He would have to make two journeys at least with his tin ewer before he transported enough oil to feed the larger pyre below, and so, to save time, he took the barrel off its stand, and rolled it along the path and into the house. He paused at the foot of the stairs, listening to hear if anything stirred, but all was silent. Whatever had slipped up there was steady again; from outside only came the squeal and bellow of the wind.

The studio was now brightly but fitfully lit by the flames on the hearth; for a moment a noonday blazed there, the next but the last smoulder of some red sunset. It was easier to decant from the barrel into his ewer than carry the heavy keg and sprinkle from it, and once and once again he filled and emptied it.

One more application would be sufficient, and after that he could let what remained trickle out on to the floor. But by some awkward movement he managed to spill a pint of it down the front of his trousers: he must be sure, therefore (how quickly his brain responded with counsels of precaution), to have some accident with his lamp when he came in to his supper, which would account for this little misadventure. Or, probably the wind through which he would presently be walking would dry it before he reached the village.

So, for the last time, with matches ready in his hand, he mounted the stairs to set light to the fuel piled in the room above. His second dose of whisky sang in his head, and he said to himself, smiling at the humour of the notion, "She always liked a fire in her bedroom; she shall have it now." That seemed a very comical idea, and it dwelt in his head as he struck the match which should light it for her. Then, still grinning, he gave one glance to the bed, and the smile died on his face, and the wild cymbals of panic crashed in his brain. The bed was empty; no huddled shape lay there.

Distraught with terror, he thrust the match into the soaked pile and the flame flared up. Perhaps the body had rolled off the bed. It must, in any case, be here somewhere, and when once the room was alight there would be nothing more to fear. High rose the smoky flame, and, banging the door, he leaped down the stairs to set light to the pile below and be gone from the house. Yet, whatever monstrous miracle his eye had assured him of, it could not be that she still lived and had left the place where she lay, for she had ceased to breathe.

But, if by some hideous witchcraft, she was not dead, it would soon be over now with her in the stupefaction of the smoke and the scorching flames. Let be; the door was shut and she within, for him it remained to be finished with the business, and flee from the house of terror, lest he leave the sanity of his soul behind him.

The red glare from the hearth in the studio lit his steps down the passage from the stairway, and already he could hear from above the dry crack and snap from the fire that prospered there. As he shuffled in, he held his hands to his head, as if pressing the brain back into its cool case, from which it seemed eager to fly out into the welter of the storm and fire and hideous imagination. If he could only control himself for a few moments more, all would be done and he would escape from this disordered haunted place into the night and the gale, leaving behind the blaze that would burn away all perilous stuff. Again the flames broke out in the embers of the hearth, bravely burning, and he took from the heart of the glare a fragment on which the fire was bursting into yellow flowers.

He heeded not the scorching of his hand, for it was but for a moment that he held it, and then plunged it into the pile that dripped with the oil he had poured on it. A tower of flame mounted, licking the rafters of the low ceiling, then died away as if suffocated by its own smoke, but crept onwards, nosing its way along till it reached the straw mat, which blazed fiercely.

That blaze kindled the courage in him; whatever trick his imagination had played on him just now, he had nothing to fear except his own terror, which now he mastered again, for nothing real could escape from the conflagration, and it was only the real that he feared. Spells and witchcrafts and superstitions, such as for the last twenty years had battened on him, were all enclosed in that tight-drawn noose.

It was time to be gone, for all was safe now, and the room was growing to oven-heat. But as he picked his way across the floor over which runnels of flames from the spilt barrel were beginning to spread this way and that, he heard from above the sound of a door unlatched, and footsteps light and firm tapped on the stairs.

For one second the sheer catalepsy of panic seized him, but he recovered his control, and with hands that groped through the thick smoke he found the door. At that moment the fire shot up in a blaze of blinding flame, and there in the doorway stood Ellen. It was no withered body and bloated face that confronted him, but she with whom he had trysted in the wood, with the bloom of eternal youth upon her, and the smooth hand, on which was her wedding-ring, pointed at him.

It was in vain that he called on himself to rush forward out of that torrid and suffocating air. The front door was open, he had but to pass her and speed forth safe into the night. But no power from his will reached his limbs; his will screamed to him, "Go, go! Push by her: it is but a phantom which you fear!" But muscle and sinew were in mutiny, and step by step he retreated before that pointing finger and the radiant shape that advanced on him. The flames that flickered over the floor had discovered the paraffin he had spilt, and leaped up his leg.

Just one spot in his brain retained lucidity from the encompassing terror. Somewhere behind that barrier of fire there was the second door into the garden. He but cursorily attempted to unlock its rusty wards; now, surely, the knowledge that there alone was escape would give strength to his hand. He leaped backwards through the flames, still with eyes fixed on her who ever advanced in time with his retreat, and turning, wrestled and strove with the key. Something snapped in his hand, and there in the keyhole was the bare shaft.

Holding his breath, for the heat scorched his throat, he groped towards where he knew was the window through which he had first seen her that night. The flame licked fiercely round it, but there, beneath his hand, was the hasp, and he threw it open. At that the wind poured in as through the nozzle of a plied bellows, and Death rose high and bright around him. Through the flames, as he sank to the floor, a face radiant with revenge scowled and smiled at him.

(Continued from page 8)

lycanthropes (15c for hardy women souls).

I am seeking articles and artwork, particularly from you wofen readers of F.F.M. Submissions and orders for either mag or both should be sent to me,

Mrs. Virginia (Jim-E) Daugherty.

1305 W. Ingraham,
Los Angeles 14, Cal.

ANSWERING MR. INDICK

"The Twenty-fifth Hour", although merely adventure (resulting nevertheless from possible episodes) is the best, most interesting, and wonderfully unusual novel printed in F.F.M. within the last two years or more—Richard Tooker's "Day of the Brown Horde" being the last fine one before it. The beginning seems to be only another what-happened-after-the-debacle story but when the story of Ann and Geoff with the natural and authentic background developed, Herbert Best's narrative craftsmanship was revealed. The cardinal difference between his novel and those preceding it—by men like George A. England and Austin Hall—novels depicting the reversion of civilized humanity to barbarism (and this difference is important, to me, at least) is that in the latter the sequence is centered predominantly in the English-speaking countries, or country, while in the former the story is removed, mostly, to more distant and exotic locales: Abyssinia, Egypt, Gibraltar. This, and the peculiar character of Hugh Fitzharding, saves the story from the mediocrity and insipidity that fill the others mentioned. If one ponders a while, all the characters seem unconventional and engrossingly original. Altogether, Mr. Best avoided the cliches and trite expressions that somehow have managed to obtain the "entrez"—oh, useful phrase!—and been put in books from Robert Louis Stevenson on up to Willa Cather. There was only the "chessboard and pawns" allusion to cause the discriminating reader mental goose pimples.

Perhaps Ben Indick has decided that I have only disparaging criticisms for stories in F.F.M. If so, this letter should relieve his worries. But his suggestion that I reread "Even a Worm" drives me into such a frenzied mood I am tempted to intone "Ygnaiih. . .thflthkh'ngha . . Yog—Sothoth. . . Even a Worm! . . . e'yayayaasa! . . . The goat with a thousand young!" But that is plagiarism and profanation all in one sentence, isn't it?

With no malice toward Mr. Indick, I will continue.

None of the inside illustrations captivated, fascinated or even pleased me. Esthetic symbolism is fine, occasionally, but many times I yearn for a literal drawing, so I can get a visual conception of characters, even if it is only that of the artist. The front painting I like, although it, too, is "symbolic". By the way, the precis that is placed beneath the name of whatever story is coming the next month must be "symbolic" also—it never fits the story. Example: "Two alone against a world gone mad, a man and a woman fight against incredible odds to find an answer to tomorrow." Hmmm.

Praise be to Allah, the Glorious, the Great! We have now had H. G. Wells' "The Island of Dr. Moreau." Mentioning H. G. Wells, he has written a superb short-short story, "Judgment Day," which surpasses in interest and enjoyment the tedious "The Time Machine."

Someone mentioned printing Haggard's "Wisdom's Daughter" (of which I proudly own a first edition copy) in F.F.M., but it is too long for that unless it is serialized.

I wish I possessed immortality so I could read all the fantasy in print, because it would require a longer life than any of us will have.

I have no complaints about your present format. I shall be magnanimous and affirm that even the infrequency of the magazine is not too deplorable, as there is a longer period of anticipation over coming stories, anticipation equally—and sometimes passing—realization. Thanks for printing stories that money, diligence and faith cannot help obtain.

Calvin Bearden.

General Delivery,
Gadsden, Ala.

AGREES WITH CPL. INDICK

I should like to compliment you on your excellent artist, Lawrence. Upon viewing June cover I thought, "That can never be beaten." But when I saw the Aug. issue—ecstasy.

I wholeheartedly concur with Cpl. Indick. His views on the relative merits of "Even a Worm", "Before I Wake", and "The House of the Secret" were very interesting and concrete. Although I have been a quite recent convert to your mag., I do have many back issues including all 5 issues of F.N.

Dick Hoyt.

376 No. 1st St.,
Co. Bluffs, Ia.

WANT TO JOIN?

Let's get straight to the point. Here's what I'm writing you for. I am planning a new type of Science and Fantasy fiction club, called the NSFFRC or the National Science and Fantasy Fiction Rating Club. Fans who want to join just drop me a penny post card with their ratings of the latest issue of F.F.M., in 1, 2, 3, manner and here's what I'll do:

Suppose there are eleven members of the club, just for convenience's sake. One member gives "The Island of Dr. Moreau" a first place vote, another member a second place vote, another a third, and so on till all eleven members have voted. I'll add them up like this:

1
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17

(Continued on page 122)

By

George

Whitley

AND NOT IN PEACE

He laughed at devils and vampires and wasn't afraid, because they belonged to the world of fantasy—forgetting that it is sometimes the realest world of all. . . .

THE bell, as usual, was out of order, and nobody answered my knocking. Then, faint but distinct from behind the glass panelled door, I heard what could have been taken for the sound of a light machine gun being loosed off in a murderous frenzy. Madge was in. There was no mistaking her heavy hand on the keyboard of her ancient portable. I always expected the darn thing to start spitting tracer at me.

Further hammering at the door was obviously useless. It was unlocked, anyhow. So I walked in.

I found Madge in the little room in which she did her work. It was in its inevitable state of picturesque untidiness—books and papers everywhere and the air blue with cigarette smoke. A combination of tightly shut windows and glowing electric fire had produced a Grade A fug.

"Oy!" I shouted. "Oy!"

The galloping typewriter slowed, gave one or two widely spaced, half-hearted crashes, then stopped.

"Oh, it's you," remarked Madge. She pushed a stray lock of tawny blond hair away from her eyes, stretched and yawned. "You would come just now, Peter. The latest masterpiece is going fine. It's one of those things that write themselves. I just had to get it started, and my characters are doing the rest. It's *their* story."

"Very labour saving. Tell me, does that kind of thing happen often?"

"More often than you'd think. Sometimes they take complete charge, and the story turns out altogether different from what you had intended. Of course, in a case like that it's unwise to interfere. Let Nature take its course."

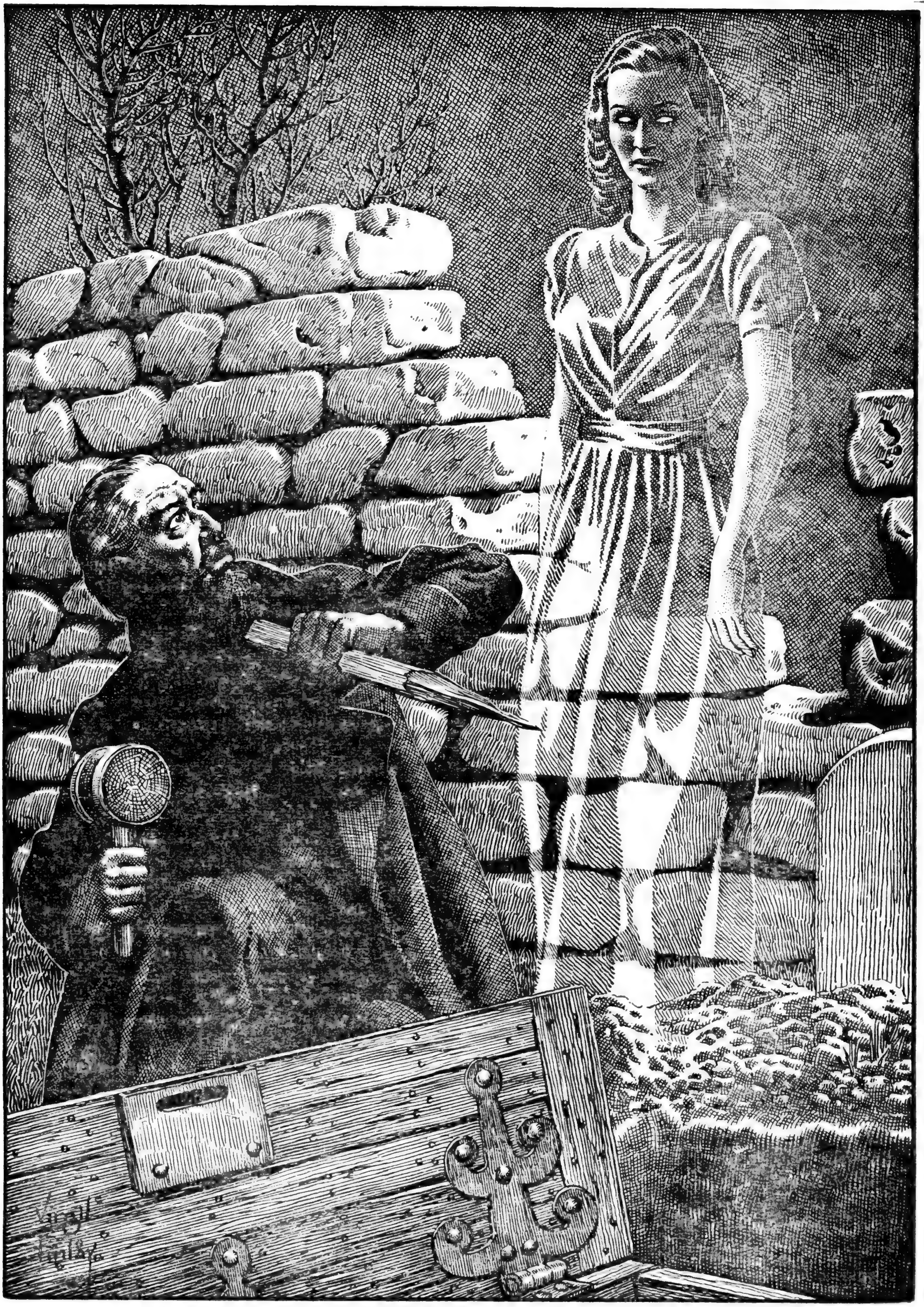
"But there must be some reason," I persisted.

"Of course. Just elementary psychology. God alone knows how many hidden personalities you may have buried below the one that you display to the world. And it so happens that, sometimes, you hit on one of these when you create a character. Dragged into the light *it* expands, develops. And then you can congratulate yourself on having breathed the breath of life into what would, otherwise, have been a very mediocre piece of fiction."

"Sounds plausible. I've heard it before, I think. Yes. I was shipmates with a second mate once, a bloke called Whitley. He used to write; you may have read his stuff in one or two of the Yankee magazines. Two of his stories he never sold—they were far too technical. All about a really super navigator doing some remarkably ingenious—and fantastic—pieces of navigation. But he claimed that he, himself, became almost in the same class as his own pet character after he'd written the damn things. I wouldn't say that myself—he was far too careless, but he was certainly a shade better than merely competent."

We lit our cigarettes.

Then—"First time I've heard that theory," said Madge. She laughed, a little un-



At the false dawn, that for which Henry Peveril waited came flitting into the old burial ground. . . .

easily. "I see that I'll have to watch my step. From now on, none of my heroines will rush into marriage."

"I wish. . . ."

"You would. I'm sorry, Peter. I like you a lot, but you just fail, somehow, to ignite that certain spark. Perhaps, some day, you may. There's nobody else, if that's any comfort to you. But I must get back to work."

"I thought that, perhaps, we could have dinner somewhere and do a show."

"Sorry, but I must finish this. We'll scrounge up something edible here and then pop across to the Magdala for a few beers. O.K.?"

"I suppose so. What is the ruddy thing, anyhow?"

"A vampire story."

"A fool there was," I quoted.

"A fool there was and he made his prayer,
(Even as you and I)
To a rag and a bone and a hank of hair
But the fool he called her his lady fair."
(We called her the woman who did not care)"

"No, you mug. Not *that* kind of vampire."

"Oh. But you're behind the times, my dear. Bram Stoker did it years ago."

"Maybe. But I'm better qualified to do that kind of thing than Bram Stoker ever was."

"Fancy yourself, don't you?"

"Not especially. But—" and her voice was low and thrilling—"I have vampire blood in my veins!"

I looked at her. She would have passed for a typical specimen of healthy, English girlhood, but never for a vampire. Lady vampires should be dark and slightly sinister—or so Hollywood would have us believe. I'm afraid that I laughed.

Madge was not amused.

"You know the pen name that I use for my horror stuff," she said icily. "Magda Korinthy. It's not a fictitious name. My grandmother was a Korinthy. And the Korinthy family are, or were, well known in Hungary."

"What are they?"

"Landowners. And, or so the legend goes, vampires."

"You don't believe that rubbish, surely?"

She grinned her engaging, little girl's grin.

"Of course not. But it makes one wonder what substratum of truth there is behind all this superstition. Some of my maternal ancestors must have been *bad* if they were supposed to have sold their souls to the devil.

"But this isn't getting this darn story written. Be a good boy, Peter. You know where everything lives, and make a pot of tea."

As I left the room the ancient typewriter was already hammering its soul out once more.

WELL, I was a good boy and I put the kettle on the gas and made the tea and unearthed a not too stale cake. I had hoped for a few minutes' conversation, at least, over the tea cups, but Madge was well into her story. She gulped her tea, stuffed her mouth with dry cake, and typed on. I don't think that she'd have noticed if I'd used salt instead of sugar.

Even when one is more than slightly in love one is apt to find that the spectacle of the lady fair hammering away at an over-age typewriter, completely oblivious to one's presence, palls. There are better ways of passing an afternoon, especially when it is part of one's precious, hard-earned leave. A walk on the Heath, for example. . . .

I wandered through to the front room. From the big windows I could look across the wide expanse of green. The war was still on, then, and the green was slightly marred by the allotments of the diggers for Victory. But it was fair enough yet under the wintry, though bright, sun. Better, at any rate, than being cooped up in a stuffy flat with a blond writer of sensational fiction.

For a while I watched the people enjoying their Saturday afternoon stroll. Apart from the fact that almost every man was in some sort of uniform it could have been a peacetime, weekend holiday scene. Old and young, they passed across my field of view, some with children barely able to walk, some with perambulators. And some were, obviously, members of the foreign colony that gives Hampstead much of its charm.

And Madge and I could have been on the Heath, enjoying the air, enjoying the people, treating ourselves, perhaps, to a cup of tea from the little shack in Ken Wood, but—she had to go and write about vampires. Vampires! With an oath I consigned those mythological beings to their Lord and Master.

I was tempted to go down and salvage some little measure of fresh air and sunlight from the wreckage of the afternoon. I wanted, also, to have a closer look at the rocket battery that was just visible from the window. But it was too much trouble. I was never one of those who enjoy a solitary walk. There is only one thing, perhaps, that a man can do by himself with any degree of enjoyment. Reading. One small comfort—Madge kept plenty of books.

Somehow, in spite of myself, I had become interested in vampires. And so I was quite annoyed when Frazer's "Golden Bough" failed to give any explicit information on the subject. There was, it is true, reference to need-fires (whatever they may be) being regarded as a protection from the undead, but that was all. Not a very useful piece of knowledge. If one had cause to suspect that one of one's friends had crossed the mystic line dividing the living and the undead, one couldn't very well go around kindling ritual conflagrations. That way lies pyromania—and a spell in gaol for arson.

It was a pity, I thought, that Madge hadn't the large edition of "The Golden Bough". All she had was that little, very condensed, one volume version. And I was willing to bet that the information I wanted was in one of the big volumes. It always is.

Once again I wandered through to the workroom.

"Oy!"

"You *are* a blasted nuisance, Peter. What do you want this time?"

"Nothing much. Just wondered if you had any reference works on lycanthropy."

"What on earth for?"

"I don't quite know. Just got interested, as you were writing a story on those lines. Couldn't find anything in Frazer."

"Here you are."

Madge rummaged among the books and papers littering the floor, exhumed a slim, ancient-looking, leather-bound volume.

"It's grandfather's book—he wrote it, I mean."

"Was he an authority on vampires?"

"He should have been. He married one. Or thought he did. They must have been credulous in those days. Take the darn thing, anyhow, and don't worry me again. And don't forget to do the blackout."

YES, they certainly were credulous in those days.

The most discomforting thing about the book wasn't the catalogue of horrors it contained, but the fact that the author had obviously believed, with implicit faith, every word that he had penned. And to think that old Henry Peveril—for that was his name—had been contemporaneous with the fathers of modern materialism! It seemed impossible that a mind such as his could have existed in the same age as Darwin and Thomas Huxley, Marx and Haeckel.

The first part of the book seemed to be a survey of Vampirism and kindred superstitions in Europe. It was the kind of thing that could have been written by any competent ethnologist, as Peveril undoubtedly was, but for one, disquieting factor. That was the belief—I almost said faith—that shone through the pedantically written pages.

The second part was a history of the Korinthy family.

It seemed that they had, as Madge had said, been a bad lot. If there was any form of satanism they hadn't practised, it was because they had never heard of it. And there didn't seem to be much they hadn't heard of. The family motto should have been—"We try anything once." And to this family came Henry Peveril, the young ethnologist, gathering material for his book. He had known Feodor Korinthy, the heir to the vast estates at Oxford.

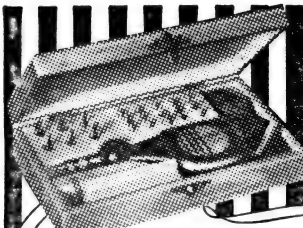
It is hard to imagine what Magda, Feodor's only sister, and the dry, rather priggish young scholar found in common. It must have been that Henry stood out in such strong contrast to the scions of the Magyar nobility who, till now, had been the only eligible young men with whom she had come into contact. The Korinthys, too, had always prided themselves on their scholarship—and here was a gentleman scholar. A combination, I should imagine, almost impossible to find in the Hungary of those days.

And Henry, of course, would have been bound to find his Magda infinitely preferable to the simpering Victorian misses he had left in England.

And so a marriage was arranged.

Surprisingly, the old count offered no objections. Perhaps he, too, was sold on the idea of having a scholarly son-in-law. Perhaps . . . but let Henry Peveril tell us in his own words.

"When we left the castle," he says, "the count embraced us both warmly and expressed his extreme gratification that the Korinthy blood would be perpetuated in other lands beyond the sea. At the time, I regarded this merely as an utterance of sentiments proper to a race-proud aristocrat. Would that I had known then what I know now!"



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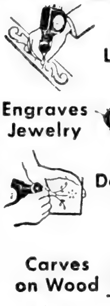

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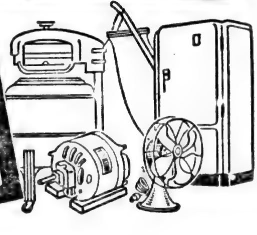

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As the tale unfolded, so it became obvious to the reader that the writer's reason was tottering. Perhaps his study of forbidden things had turned his mind. Be that as it may, the marriage, at first so happy, became a thing of dark horror. There are frequent references to the wearing of garlic as a protection against vampires. There is an account of the theft of holy water from a church. To what use he intended to put it I cannot say, but unfortunately, or fortunately, he was discovered in the attempt and in the ensuing chase the bottle was dropped and smashed.

And then, in the vicinity of the Peveril home, there were mysterious deaths among the livestock of the neighbouring farmers. And one or two children appeared to have died of pernicious anaemia. Only a madman would have seen any connection between the human and the animal fatalities—but Peveril was not sane.

A child was born, a son. Madge's father. The unfortunate Sophia died soon after.

The death of his wife seems to have pushed Henry Peveril over the narrow border between brilliance and insanity. For, he says, after the funeral she used to visit him nightly. The garlic was a protection, but he still loved her and, often as not, when she appeared he would hurl it from him. And more children died of anaemia.

The book concludes with the account of a midnight visit to the churchyard. There was a waning, misshapen moon, and a chill little wind rustled plaintively among the mossy stones. Peveril fell to with his spade and uncovered his wife's coffin. It was empty. So he waited, until the false dawn was in the sky. And something white and diaphanous came flitting into the old burial ground and, at last, lay down with a tired little sigh, like that of a child on the verge of sleep, in the open coffin.

Then Henry Peveril did that which he had to do.

He had brought with him a sharpened stake and a heavy maul. Stepping to the verge of the grave, he placed the point of the stake over the heart of the corpse and, with one blow of his maul, drove it home.

"She screamed most piteously," he says, "and the blood that spurted up and covered my hands was hot and fresh. I felt—nay, I *feel*—like a murderer, and yet I am confident that I have brought rest to the soul of that unhappy creature. May the Almighty have mercy on mine. Amen."

I felt sick. Literally, physically sick.

That kind of thing is all very well in fiction—but this was no fiction. Scratch a civilized man and, beneath the skin, you find the old superstitious savage—or worse. For he will, inevitably, be a decadent savage.

BUT the sun was down and the dusk was coming in with long strides. I went through every room of the flat, adjusting the heavy, opaque curtains before each window. When I did the workroom blackout I returned Henry Peveril's book.

"What did you think of it?" Madge asked.

"It sickened me."

"Now you see, my dear," she said, "why I must never marry. I've been wanting to tell you for some time but, somehow, I just couldn't. But this seemed a good opportunity to let old Henry tell you in his own words. The Peveril blood is tainted."

"But surely you don't believe . . ."

"In *that*?" She smiled wanly. "Of course not. There's no vampirism—but there *is* insanity. Shortly after the publication of this little masterpiece, Henry Peveril was committed to an institution for the criminally insane. . . ."

From somewhere outside came a long, shrill whistle.

"Here they are," said the girl.

"That was never the siren."

"Of course not. But raiders *have* crossed the coast. They may, almost certainly will, make for London. That was the signal for the gun crews on the Heath to stand to."

"What a day!" I said, bitterly. "It may as well finish up with an air raid. . . ."

Somebody, somewhere, must have slipped up rather badly. Even as I spoke the most detested sound of the war made the night hideous. Hampstead called to Highbury, and Holloway answered Kentish Town. One was reminded of the beacon fires that flashed the word of the coming of the Spanish Armada all around the English coast.

This new armada was deadlier than the one sent against us by Philip of Spain, but men of the breed of Drake manned the guns, the wardens' posts, and the fire stations; and soared on roaring wings into the night to do battle with the new barbarians.

I felt singularly helpless, like a passenger in some great liner when the crew have gone to action stations. The analogy was not a very good one, for, in these days,

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passengers are expected to contribute rather more to the safety of the vessel than the price of their tickets. But the great ship that was London was far from undermanned, and the only contribution that a mere sailor on leave could make to its defense was to keep from underfoot and do his best not to provide any extra work for the already overstrained hospitals and medical services.

From the north came the rumble of heavy guns, the distant drone of multi-engined planes, and one or two heavy crashes that could only be bombs.

"Shall we go down to the shelter before the splinters start falling?" I asked.

"You can, if you like. I'm carrying on with this. It's not hard to infuse an atmosphere of uneasiness into a story when you're feeling as uneasy as all hell yourself. . . ."

The little typewriter tried hard to drown the noises out. It did its best, but its best wasn't good enough.

"I don't like this," I muttered, and I wandered through to the front room. Lifting the blackout curtains, I peered out into the clear, frosty night.

The sky was sprinkled with little, orange-yellow, evanescent stars. They twinkled briefly, then vanished, but where each little flower of flame had briefly bloomed two more sprang into being. Like the sword of St. George a blazing searchlight swept across the sky. Low to the nor'ard, Finchley way, was a dull, flickering, red glare. The glass of the windows vibrated and rattled with the almost continuous concussion.

I wanted, very badly, to see the rockets fired. Childish, perhaps, but as armaments officer of my ship I had a professional interest. But I was scared of glass. One hears so many stories of the ghastly mess it makes of anybody who gets in the way when a blast sends it flying.

At last, reluctantly, I let the curtain fall and withdrew from the window. Just then the gunners on the Heath loosed their great war rockets into the hostile sky. It seemed that the blasted things skimmed the very tiles.

Shaken more than I cared to admit I groped my way along the passage to the little workroom. The light, when I opened the door, hurt my eyes. Madge was still seated at her table, a cigarette hanging between her lips. She was rattling away as though her life depended on it.

I started to speak, then changed my mind. She was so obviously wrapped up in her story that I'd get no thanks for breaking the spell. All the same, I didn't like the way she looked. White, and queer, and—tense. Do you know, I even had the idea that if I put the light out her eyes would glow in the dark like those of some animal?

Salvo after salvo roared up from the Heath batteries, squadron after squadron of raiders sailed serenely overhead. Did I say serenely? A slip of the pen. For there was one, at least, of the enemy pilots who wasn't very serene. I had the impression that he was caught in the barrage, that he was twisting and turning in a vain endeavour to escape from that particular corner of hell. And still the guns thundered, still the war rockets probed every corner of the sky with their javelins of flying fire.

Whether it was the courage born of desperation, or whether the pilot had his orders, I shall never know. But it soon became obvious that this one plane, which I had blandly assumed to be trapped by the barrage, was out to get the rocket battery. He got them, they got him . . . and the last bomb of the stick got us.

I HEARD that whistling scream, and I knew what it was. Blindly, instinctively, I flung myself upon Madge. She and I and the typewriter went down in a heap upon the floor.

All very senseless, really, when you're in a top flat. But I wasn't thinking just then.

The bomb must have struck at, or near, the base of the building. It seemed as though the floor came up and hit us, and then it tilted, ever so slowly. With a great rending of timbers and crashing of brickwork everything seemed to go sliding down, and down, and down.

I don't know how long I was out. When I came round I thought at first that the blood was drumming in my ears. But it wasn't that. It was the guns. And yet, somehow, it seemed very quiet. We had had ours. The raid, for us, was over.

Experimentally, I moved, first my arms and then my legs. I was still in one piece. Nothing seemed to be broken, although blood from a nasty gash on my forehead was running down into my eyes. But where was Madge? Slowly, painfully, I raised myself into a sitting posture and looked around.

We were, I saw, sprawled out in the road,

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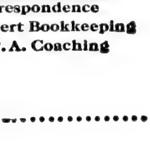

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lying among the wreckage of the block of flats. Somewhere, something was burning, casting a dim, ruddy light over the ruins. A rescue squad was at work, but, judging from the distance from which their voices seemed to be coming, it would be some little time before they reached us.

But where was Madge?

At last I found her, hardly a foot from me. She was crushed beneath the heavy refectory table that had been her pride and joy. And she was dead. This much was obvious. She was dead.

By this time I had gained sufficient strength to struggle to my feet. But I didn't. What was the use? What was the use of anything any more? So I just lay there, my head a little to one side, watching the body of the only person who had ever meant anything in my rather lonely, rather selfish life. I could, at least, ensure that when they came to bury the dead she was treated with proper courtesy.

The crackling of the fire came closer, and thick smoke drifted across the ruins. In that dim, misty light it seemed that Madge stirred a little, that the eyelids over those dreadful, staring eyes flickered.

She *had* moved!

This time there was no doubt about it. I wanted to get to my feet, to pull and heave at that accursedly heavy table, to. . . .

But I couldn't move.

How it was done I don't know. But the refectory table didn't shift, and the wreckage under it was undisturbed. But there was Madge, standing on a pile of rubble, staring around with eyes that seemed to glow in the dark. Those weird eyes found mine and then, in a second, she was by my side.

"My darling," she breathed. "My darling. . . ."

It was the kind of voice that I'd prayed she would use for me for more years than I cared to remember, but now, when the moment had come, it sounded—somehow—wrong.

Then she was down with me on the pile of wreckage, and her lips were seeking mine. Whether it was weakness or whether it was her kisses I cannot say, but I must have fainted. A sharp pain in my neck brought me around. She was still kissing me, but her sharp teeth had punctured the skin of my throat. . . .

Wildly, I groped for a weapon, for anything to dash into that beloved, yet hateful face. It wasn't Madge, it was *something* from Outside. And yet Madge was there too. . . . My fingers closed on something hard and rough. I brought my arm up. Yet I never struck her. For what I had found was two pieces of wood at right angles to each other, the nail or bolt that held them together still in place. Yes, a cross.

Madge screamed once, then was gone, a pale figure flitting over the ruins like a fog wraith before the breeze.

And I fainted again.

YES, they found her body in the morning, when daylight revealed the raw, new wounds on the body of the ancient city. And they buried her. I was at the funeral.

It was a ghastly affair. So—final. And there was a crowd of relations there whom I had never known that Madge possessed. It was plain that they looked upon me as an interloper. But I stuck it out. For she had meant more to me than she ever had to them.

At last—I felt, somehow, that I had a right to know—I asked one of them what the epitaph was to be. She looked at me with great distaste and snapped—"*Requiescat in pace;* that has *always* been the Peveril epitaph." I thanked her, and moved away.

One of the others, a pimply youth, approached me and said, "Aunt Clara's putting on dog again. We've only had it over our graves since old Henry Peveril, and he was completely nuts."

"Really?" I said, and left them all and went away and got drunk.

* * *

R.I.P. Requiescat in pace. Rest in peace.

But it's not enough.

Words cut into a stone are not enough, no matter what the words are.

And people wonder why I, who am not religious, always wear a crucifix. Strangely enough, the piece of garlic provokes far less curiosity. That is regarded as being merely a piece of mild insanity, like red flannel next to the skin or an iodine locket.

But the sharpened stake. . . .

I can't do it.

I haven't the guts of that stern Victorian, Henry Peveril. I doubt if any of us have, and we don't believe any more in very real forces of evil.

I should do it. I *must* do it.

But I can't, I tell you, I can't!

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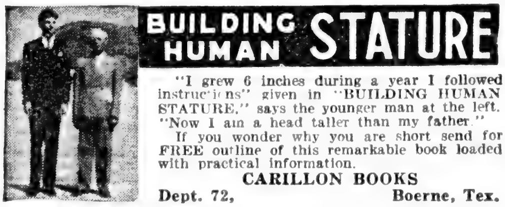
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(Continued from page 111)

then I'll average the votes, carrying them out to three places like this:

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Hence, the final score of "The Island of Dr. Moreau" by H. G. Wells would be 1.545. The story with the lowest score takes the issue, of course.

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I've written letters to five *other* magazines proposing my idea, but whether they will be published I don't know. I hope you can find room for this letter as I am trying hard to put this club over big.

The more members the better. No restrictions as to where you live, readers.

By the way, I recently learned of the death of H. G. Wells. One of the greatest science and fantasy-fiction writers of all time has departed to the land Beyond. . . .

REX E. WARD.

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INTERESTING ANALYSIS

The cover painting of the August F.F.M. was one of the cleverest pieces of work Lawrence has done for your book. It is a far cry from the pink-limbed, tatterdemalion dames which have hitherto disgraced too many of your covers.

The subdued hues of the painting, together with the subtle arrangements of the figures, particularly commendable in the use of certain limbs to suggest the skull's teeth, have produced a cover whose quality and consequent attractiveness is second to none. However, the apparent determination of your art editor to impose the flashing yellow title background on your readers goes a long way toward spoiling the general effect. Surely the elimination of the red and yellow altogether and the use of quiet shades of blue and green in the title lettering would have improved the whole immensely. . . .

The interior illustrations were just adequate, perhaps because the stories published this time had little inherent illustrative value. The drawing for Stoker's hair-raising narrative was obviously the best. In the initial illustration of Best's novel, Lawrence has captured the atmosphere of a snow-bound bit of European territory quite nicely. The simple act of looking at it puts a shiver in my bones, and brings back a rush of memories. I've stood guard mount many times in very nearly the same surroundings, minor differences being in the chateau, which was burned out, and the skyline, which was aglow beyond the chateau with the almost constant artillery bombardment of the areas across the Rhine. Nostalgia overwhelms me, and I wipe away a tear shed in fond remembrance of those dear dead days I spent on the continent.

I am glad to see that a greater variety of contents is to be the reader's happy lot in the forthcoming October issue. The usual F.F.M. menu of one novel and one short item has not been too pleasing in the past, although I realize this is due more to the shortage of paper and the resulting smaller size of the book than to editorial whim and fancy. The two presentations in the August number are above reproach in quality, but I can find little reason for the inclusion of the Stoker short, which is available in nearly any large library.

I would like to add, in conclusion, that I am a reasonably well-paying market for spotless copies of *Weird Tales* prior to 1941, any numbers of *Magic Carpet Magazine* or *Oriental Stories* and F.F.M. prior to Popular publication.

My heartiest wishes for a brilliant publishing future—which you shall surely have if you continue to emulate your past record.

Bill Blackbeard.

Corona del Mar,
California.

ABOUT TWENTY-FIFTH HOUR

The August F.F.M. sailed into the newsstand at approximately the same time I did; and 'twas a joyful reunion for at least one of us.

Lawrence's cover painting is very striking, in both idea and execution. It constitutes his best work to date as far as I'm concerned. I personally prefer Finlay, but Lawrence is certainly more than an "also-ran." The ideal art staff for F.F.M.—or any stfantasy mag—would include Finlay, Lawrence, Bok, and Paul—a dream quartet.

Best's "The Twenty-fifth Hour" was a good fantastic story. Note that I say "fantastic" as distinct from "fantasy". There are several points upon which I might argue with Mr. Best—and doubtless come out second-best, as it were. For example, I seriously doubt that, in a world as far gone as our battered old planet was in the early stages of the story, the hero would still have his batman to draw his bath for him and carefully examine each pillow to make certain that it would not induce hay-fever, asthma, or what-have-you. If he insisted on such favors he would probably wind up as a steak.

Best is to be congratulated, however, for several items. It is refreshing to see even a hero become a cannibal in the face of starvation—the leading men in most stories seem to be utterly devoid of any faults or traces of human weaknesses. Best constantly surprised in that respect—he even killed off one of his principal characters. His philosophy is interesting, especially so in the concluding moments of the story. Would it—*could* it work out that way? Under such conditions? Who knows?

"Secret of the Growing Gold", by Bram "Dracula" Stoker was simply another tale of ghostly revenge. It has, I might add, been done better.

Lawrence's interiors were disappointing. Not that they were bad—far from it. But they were not up to par, for either F.F.M. or Lawrence.

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"The Reader's Viewpoint" is always interesting.

Chad Oliver.

1311—25th St.,
Galveston, Texas

CANADA TALKS

Although I have been an ardent science-fiction and fantasy fan for many years, this is my first letter to the Editor.

Your August issue, presenting "The Twenty-fifth Hour", provided the incentive where previously existed only the urge. I started "The Twenty-fifth Hour" at 11:45 p. m. and became so thoroughly engrossed that it was with surprise that I became aware that the electric light was no longer necessary when I finished the tale.

The magazine is to me thoroughly satisfying. I have only one complaint, that being "This offer is good only in U. S. A." rider attached to the tantalizing advertisements of illustration reproductions.

Frustratedly yours,
George S. Brown.

2230 Arad St.,
Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada

ABOUT BRAM STOKER

"Secret of the Growing Gold" takes first place in the August issue; which in itself, is rather strange, for usually the author of a novel has a lot more "room" in which to work out his characters and extend his plot. But nevertheless, Bram Stoker, creator of the immortal "Dracula", scores a very honorable triumph with his superb tale.

Herbert Best's novel, "The Twenty-fifth Hour", was also a good tale, but it was rather a letdown after the "Undying Monster", in the June issue. The latter was definitely one of the best fantasy stories ever penned. In spite of this, Herbert Best has succeeded in entertaining me for many delightful evenings.

The forecast for the next issue seems like an astoundingly good one; not only for the fact that there are more stories in the magazine, this time, but because of the authors who have written them! Look at those names! H. G. Wells, Clemence Dame Bram Stoker, and one of the best (if not *the* best) author in the field—Catherine Moore! Truly I am thrilled and will await this wonderful issue eagerly.

Now for a few suggestions for forthcoming issues. Sir A. Conan Doyle's "The Lost World" would be more than welcome any time—the sooner the better. Doyle is excellent when he stays away from the Sherlock Holmes stories, which I couldn't force myself to read when it was given to me as a gift. **(I'd better shut up or** the Holmes fanatics will swamp me!) I sound, here, as though Doyle is still alive—which he isn't, so don't get me wrong.

Wells' "War of the Worlds" is another superb classic which would look nice in F.F.M.

All the Stokers you can get hold of—except "Dracula".

I'll pack up my Underwood now, congratulating you all, and wishing you the best of luck in future F.F.M.'s.

R. WARD.

El Segundo, California.

MAGNIFICENT FANTASY

I have been reading and collecting science fiction and fantasy for almost the last six years. I have just finished reading your latest feature story "The Twenty-fifth Hour". It is a magnificent fantasy worthy of F.F.M.'s reputation. I hope to see an even better issue next month.

If it will be possible to revive *Fantastic Novels* please be sure to print stories by Merritt, Stoker, England and the great classics of Stapledon.

To any of the readers who wish to trade magazines, I will be glad to trade Burroughs' Tarzan books and old *Amazings, Astoundings* and *Fantastics* for issues of Merritt's tales in book form.

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WELCOMING STOKER

Since I have never before written to you, and since I am in a letter writing mood, I thought I'd join the rest of your fans in complimenting you on the exceptionally fine magazine you are giving us and to offer a few suggestions for future issues.

First, I would like to congratulate artist Lawrence on the truly magnificent cover he did for the August issue. It was, without doubt, the finest bit of symbolism I've ever seen on a fantasy magazine, or any other magazine for that matter.

The long novel this time did not particularly appeal to me—too much like the numerous other "Fall of Civilization" stories, Wright's "Deluge" for instance.

Glad to see Bram Stoker at last in F.F.M. I'd like to read more of his stuff, perhaps "Dracula" if enough fans would want it. As to other future selections, how about "An Occurence at Owl Creek Bridge" by Ambrose Bierce, also "The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath" by Lovecraft, all the rest of Hodgson's works and something by Clark Ashton Smith. I can't see why a writer of his caliber has been overlooked by F.F.M.

JAMES ELLIS.

604 10th St., SW,
Washington, D. C.

P. S. Need several back numbers of F.F.M.—can anyone help?

AUGUST COVER PRAISED

I bought my first copy of F.F.M. when it first appeared in Ottawa. It contained John Taine's classic, "Before the Dawn" and for that reason I presumed I would get a reasonable share of good stf from the mag, despite its fantasy title. However, since then, I have received "The Island of Cap Sparrow", "The Undying Monster" *et al.* These were all readable and occasionally great yarns. The Cap's Island was exceptionally good with its snatches of philosophy and good action. The Monster was an extraordinary example of how horror could be built up to almost unbearable pitch. As to "The Willows", I can but say that, although it may be the greatest fantasy ever written, I simply couldn't finish it. I got to the part where the willows were sneaking up on the guys in the tent and then had to stop to gag. I never got started again.

Now, though, all is forgiven, for in the August issue you have given us a fine example of science fiction. No BEM's, no extra-terrestrials, no sizzle-gats but stf just the same. A story built around the theory of an over-developed civilization breaking down so completely in the holocaust of war that what is so masterfully pictured by Best in the story is the result. Great.

Of course, in order to make his story fit the then existing weapons of war, Best has used some questionable strategies, such as the theory that the warring countries would both use only bombers in their air forces and no interceptors or pursuits. But what difference do a few weak details make in a story of such basic probing as this was?

"The Secret of the Growing Gold" can be described in one beautifully descriptive word—hack.

The August cover was an absolute masterpiece of symbolism that fitted the story magnificently. Lawrence's interiors are all of his incredible standard. The one on P. 10 is perfect—no other word can describe it. It makes one chill to look at it. When I said that all of the interiors were of his standard, I had overlooked the P. 33 let-down. It is the only Lawrence I have ever seen that was poor.

Oh, yes, one more thing. . . We want Stapledon!

Yours stfly,
R. R. Anger.

520 Highland Ave.,
Ottawa, Canada.

NO HORROR, PLEASE

I have bought and read every issue of F.F.M. since the first in 1939, with the exception of that most controversial one containing, "The Man Who Was Thursday", which I was unable to secure. I have saved every issue because I considered them tops in the field of Fantasy, which brings us to the point of this letter.

In the earlier issues the majority of the stories satisfied my conception of Fantasy, which I believe is most nearly expressed by the definition given in "The Winston Dictionary", i. e. "a work of literature showing extravagant fancy in spirit and design", or, "mental imagery, usually pleasant". No mention of horror such as is promised in the October issue, e. g. "The Island of Dr. Moreau, when a horror legend becomes a hideous reality," or, the past June number featuring, "The Undying Monster, a tale of midnight terror". Is this the type of stories we may expect in the future? If so, why not change the name to Horror Tales?

A. Merritt has been my favorite since our first meeting through the pages of *Argosy* many years ago. His descriptive passages are sheer delight rather than sheer horror. Many of his best, I believe, are in "The Metal Monster", wherein he creates suspense, awe, wonder, etc. which holds the reader spellbound without

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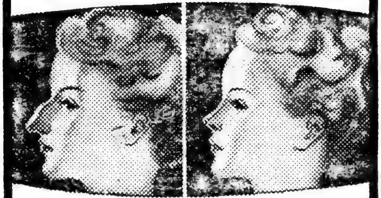

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(to my mind) the slightest sense of horror. May we not have more s[illegible] [illegible]is type?

By the way, now that the Carolines are no longer in Jap hands is there any possibility that there will be any exploration of "The Lost City of Metalinem" off the shores of Ponape? This city I have heard is actual and it was hoped that exploration would give more factual information on forgotten races of the Pacific. This also was the locality chosen by Merritt for his "Moon Pool".

Now, may I through your column "The Readers Viewpoint" enlist the aid of your readers in finding some stories I want? I would like to buy, borrow or in some manner secure the following: "The Woman of the Wood" by Merritt; "Jason, Son of Jason" by J. U. Giesy; "Treasures of Tantalus" by Garret Smith; "Minos of Sardanes" and "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian" by C. B. Stilson; "The Queen of Life", "The Devolutionist" "The Emancipatrix" and others by H. E. Flint; also any by Serviss, Cummings and C. A. Smith

H. F. RAYL.

1524 Oregon Ave.,
Steubenville, Ohio.

DEFINING FANTASY

It seems a common practice for your readers to criticize, constructively or otherwise, the policies of your publication. This practice strikes me as one of the reasons why your magazine is loved. Now, if you'll permit me, I, also, would like to express my reaction to your work.

First, on the contents of F.F.M.—

I believe that the policy of publishing genuine fantasy should be maintained without deviation. Admittedly there are various views as to what constitutes fantasy. My own idea of a liberal definition of fantasy would be any serious or humorous story pertaining to the supernatural, the weird, the strange. This category would include adventures into all ages and imaginable civilizations, but definitely does not include "science-fiction".

It is not my purpose here to appraise that class of literature that deals with planets and space-ships. I merely wish to point out that F.F.M. is virtually the only magazine now available to lovers of good fantasy; so, in fairness to readers who have no desire for space-ship tales and who, also, must wait two months between stories. the magazine should be strictly a fantasy publication. If the "science-fiction" addicts want planet stories they should worry the publishers of the half-dozen or so magazines that now cater to readers of that type of literature.

My personal preferences in authors of fantasy are Blackwood, Chambers, Haggard, Hodgson, Lovecraft, Merritt, Machen, Stoker, Clark Ashton Smith, S. F. Wright, and John Taine.

Dunsany would have been the peer of all fantasy writers except for a too cloying mysticism in many of his tales. He remains, however, the most perfect craftsman of all fantasy writers.

Merritt undoubtedly deserves his great popularity, and I only wish that some of his works were not marred by his political bias.

I have a special fondness for Rider Haggard. It happened that the first full length novel I read as a boy was his "Nada the Lily". Rereading it recently, after a 30 year interval, I still found it a fine work and deserving of being better known to lovers of fantasy. You deserve only praise for using Chesterton's "The Man Who Was Thursday," and also Claude Farrere's "The House of the Secret." The latter is well written, satisfying fantasy.

Although in different vein, I enjoyed the Taine stories you gave us. Please, more Taine.

I prefer to read a story in your magazine even if it is available in book form, because of the illustrations in your edition. These are, almost invariably, well done and in the spirit of the text.

You are doing a fine job in the main by providing good fantasy. Keep it fantasy, and if possible, give it to us oftener. The reader's department is vital.

ANGELO DA SILVA.

53-11 Court,
Hermosa Beach, Cal.

CAN YOU HELP?

I've just finished rushing through the June edition, and I enjoyed "The Undying Monster" very much. The Machen story disappointed me a bit, although I really don't know what I was expecting. Lovecraft always handled that sort of thing better, I think. As for the cover—well, it was vaguely reminiscent of those on some of the less savory pulps—not up to par, I'd say. However, interior illustration on page 41 was excellent.

I'm in a bit of a spot, and I hope someone of the readers will help me. I managed to get hold of the "Man Who Was Thursday" issue and proceeded to read straight through, only to find that the *last* page was missing. I've been chewing my nails ever since. I'd be more than appreciative if someone would please tell me what happened; I haven't been able to find the story anywhere.

Thanks for a great magazine.

SHIRLEY H. RUBIN.

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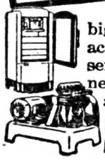

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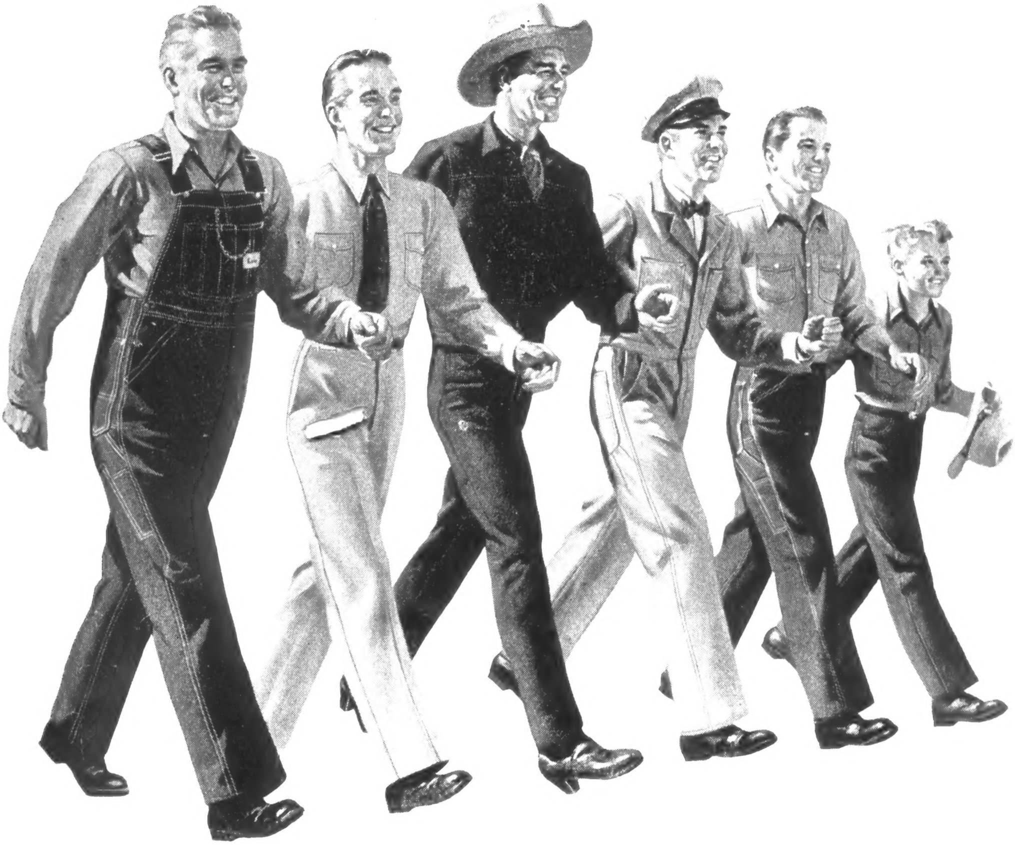

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